

海空りく

RIKU MISORA

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落第騎士の





落第騎士の  
英雄譚 7



なかなか似合っている  
じゃないですか。

ステラさん

なんだか金魚みたいで  
可愛い……







チビちゃんになって、  
ツキの山にとびこんじゃうびと♪





バーブル・カリカチユア  
《幻想戯画》

ひよく  
比翼のエンゼルワイス

一輝の視界に映るは——穢れなき純白。  
見まごうはすがない。  
薄ら日のように淡く輝く身体に、一對  
の翼のような純白の剣を携えた幻想は、  
かつて一度だけ剣を交えた、世界最強の  
剣士だった。

# **Intermission - A Victory Without Aftertaste**

## **Part 1**

Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival day two.

C-Block second match, Ikki Kurogane vs Byakuya Jougasaki.

The outcome of the fight between the up-and-coming F-Rank Knight, who had defeated Seven Stars Sword King in the first match, and the runner-up of last year's Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival was decided in a way nobody could have ever predicted.

After the surprise attack by Ikki's Ittou Rasetsu at the beginning of the match, Byakuya Jougasaki sank down in the ring without being able to move a single step from the starting line.

The conclusion was so one-sided that the main referee was astonished, but.

“Referee.”

He remembered his role as Ikki’s voice beckoned him to hurry up with the verdict, and then he walked towards the fallen Byakuya.

After confirming that he had completely lost his consciousness, he announced the end of the match.

This result caused an uproar in the venue.

「W-Woow! What just happened!? Contender Worst One, Ikki Kurogane! In an instant after the match began! In that instant, he closed in on contender Eye of Heaven, Byakuya Jougasaki, and cut him down at ooonce!」

「O-Oi, what was that just now!?」

「Did you see what happened just now?」

「N-No, not at all. Just when I thought that the match finally started, before I knew it.....」

The match ended.

All of the spectators showed confused expressions, not being able to understand what had happened.

However, they couldn't be blamed.

The reason was — The technique that Ikki had used just then was a strike that completely exceeded the limit of a normal person's dynamic vision.

「Just now, he used the same move from his fight against Raikiri, an enhanced version of Ittou Shura, which expends the full power of his own body for one minute with sharpened concentration and body control. He used that, coupled with the sword of Twin-Wings, creating the fastest attack at the opening of the match.....So that's how it is, this is indeed reasonable.」

The one who explained that to the spectators, who were unable to digest the situation, was a suit-wearing, bespectacled woman in her prime, replacing Muroto-pro in the commentator's seat. She was Yaotome-pro.

Iida, who was still the announcer, asked her.



「Is the combination of those two really so reasonable?」

「It is. You can say that, be it the Noble Art of Another One or the sword technique of Twin-Wings, they share the same principle.

Swinging with all their strength in an instant.

Both of them are techniques derived from instant explosive strength as its foundation.

Hence, the combination of them gives a synergistic effect.

As for how impressive it is, the duration of the match makes it obvious.」

Hearing that, Iida's eyes popped open after confirming the duration of the match again.

「T-This is.....! W-What a shocking number! The match duration is an unbelievable 0.8 seconds! Contender Ikki Kurogane! He pulverized the runner-up of the previous Festival while shattering the previous speed



recooord!」

「N-Not even one second!」

「Oi! What was the record in the Festival until now?」

「It should be about twenty seconds.」

「He shortened it to less than one-twentieth of that.....!」

「S-So cool.....」

「That's so cool, bro! Go and win it with this pace!」

「Do your best! Ikki-kun!」

「Receiving the cheers, contender Kurogane walked towards the waiting room after an overwhelming victory in record speed against the previous Festival's runner-up! He has overcome the disadvantage of magic inadaptability as an F-Rank with superhuman instantaneous power, magnificently advancing to the third round! Strong! Truly strong, Another One! Will he be able to make his way up to the top of Seven Stars like this!? Don't take your eyes off the third round in



the afternoooooon!」

Despite being the underdog since the beginning of this Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival, Ikki's achievement of beating the first and second place of the previous Festival stirred up the venue.

However, amongst that, Yaotome's observant gaze from the depth of her spectacles stared at the back of the winner who was leaving the ring, and thought.

It was indeed an overwhelming result for Ikki, but —

(Now then, can this match really be called 「an overwhelming victory」?)



## Part 2

“.....!”

Going through the gate, after returning to a place the spectators could not see, Ikki leaned against the wall of the passage and gasped.

An excessive amount of sweat formed on his forehead.

Dripping down next to his feet were.....drops of blood.

Ittou Rasetsu was a technique that boasted ten times the instantaneous power of Ittou Shura.

It produced a burden that even Ikki's well-trained body could not endure.

It was pretty much a self-destructive technique.

Initially, it was not a technique that anyone would really want to use, even for Ikki.

However.....he believed that this was fine.

Because,

(.....If I had proceeded as usual in the match, Eye of Heaven would've caught me in a minimum of twenty-three steps.)

Before the match, Byakuya, with his observation power nicknamed Eye of Heaven, had imagined how their battle would play out. Ikki, with his observing eyes like an evil-revealing magic mirror, had arrived at the exact same conclusion.

Including the fact that Byakuya had not considered the possibility of surprise attack with Ittou Rasetsu at the match opening, everything.

In that case, he had to make use of that.

In order to secure the victory.

And then it was carried out in the form just as it was, which worked as intended.

However.....

(It was not as much of an overwhelming victory as it



seemed.)

Ikki was aware of that fact.

It was obvious.

Why would the Eye of Heaven, who could see through the whole flow of their match before the match, make a fundamental mistake?

That was.....because a surprise attack from the start was just that irrational of a choice.

For the convenience of the match schedules, the third round would be held in the afternoon that day. Not to mention, his opponent was.....Bloody Da Vinci, Sara Bloodlily, who defeated Sword Eater with overwhelming power. She was a hidden ace in Akatsuki Academy who could materialize the things she drew, even reproducing the Noble Arts unique to Mage-Knights.

He had used up his trump card limited to once a day before facing such a monstrous opponent.

In the context of the whole tournament, Ikki had

drastically reduced his chances of winning.

Although Byakuya was a difficult opponent, he wished he had saved his trump card and thought of another way; that would've been more logical.

However, Ikki used his trump card.

No, more accurately speaking.....he had no choice but to use it.

Because his opponent was not someone he could fight while having the next match in mind.

In other words, this match had already cornered Ikki.

(Although I acted brave and said those words before Stella, consecutive battles are tough, after all.)

There was not a fragment of joy from the victory within Ikki.

There was only anxiety.

The Seven Stars Sword Art Festival had gathered the strongest student knights in Japan, and now he had to



fight twice in a day.

On top of that, his third round opponent was Sara, whose Noble Art Purple Caricature could reproduce Ikki's own Noble Art, Ittou Shura, and of course his sword techniques.

If she felt like it, she could probably also use the technique Ikki had used to defeat Byakuya back then.

(Can I come up with a strategy to face her without Ittou Shura.....)

In addition to Sara's ability, what made Ikki feel heavy was.....her obsession.

For some reason, she persistently pressed him to be her nude model.

Because of her, he had to sleep in his brother's room.

.....If he lost, she might strip him naked in the ring.

If that happened, he would not be able to show his face anymore.

Not to mention, this time's Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival was broadcasted worldwide.

“Ugh.....my stomach.....it hurts more than my body.....”

The third round became a serious match for Ikki, in many ways.



# **Chapter 8 - The Rowdy Medical Room**

## **Part 1**

After the match, Ikki entered a capsule set up in the venue to cure his wounds.

Using the capsule, the recoil injury caused by using Ittou Rasetsu, serious to the extent that his flesh was starting to peel off, was completely healed in a matter of minutes. The injury would not affect his next match.

After curing his wounds, Ikki was transferred to a bed in the Medical Room with the help of a medical staff and took a light nap there.

That was because he had been given a light dose of full-body anesthetic before entering the capsule.

And the monitor installed in the Medical Room where he slept was displaying the current match held at the venue.

The one who was fighting was.....his little sister, Lorelai Shizuku Kurogane, and last year's third place, Momiji Asagi.

「D-Block second match, contender Momiji Asagi's movements are very nimble! This is impressive! So impressive! Lightly evading the barrage of Water Prison Orb, she is gradually closing in! Contender Momiji's speed is just too fast for contender Shizuku to lock on!」

「She isn't just fast.」





「What do you mean?」

「The technique contender Momiji has used just now is called trackless step, a unique type of stepping that her master, God of War Torajirou Nangou, is good at. This stepping method lets the user slip out of the opponent's field of vision, and without a certain degree of expertise in martial arts, it's difficult to break through this technique if he cannot concentrate on his own body and freely control it. This will be hard to deal with for contender Shizuku, who is completely specialized in magic.」

Just as Yaotome said, Shizuku in the display image could not capture Momiji's movement and wasn't doing well in terms of offense.

In the midst of that, Momiji broke through the long range distance from Shizuku, and circled around her back with trackless step.

「Look at that! Contender Shizuku's back has been exposed!」

And she swung down her Device, which was a

Japanese katana-shaped Device clad in crimson flame.

Shizuku could not react to that.

She suffered from this technique once before in the fight against Raikiri, but to break through it, she had to control her brain and body to operate against her instinct and reflex.

It was a technique that could only be obtained after training her body for a long period of time.

It was not something that could be learned quickly.

— However, this girl did not need that.

The instant Momiji's naked blade was about to gouge into Shizuku's back, ice wall bursted up from around her feet, stopping the blade in its tracks.

The sudden and unexpected reaction from Shizuku caused Momiji to be shocked.

That moment determined the outcome of the fight.

Momiji, whose movement dulled from the shock, was

hit by Shizuku's Noble Art Water Prison Orb.

「W-What!? She has intercepted contender Momiji who went behind her back and slashed at her without even turning baaack! Contender Momiji has been caught by Water Prison Orb! The Water Prison Orb that hit contender Momiji immediately climbed up her body and blocked her windpipe! Contender Momiji is desperately trying to peel it off, but her target is a liquid! She cannot even grab onto it! H-However, why was contender Shizuku able to tell the location of contender Momiji!?!」

「.....I see. That's quite crafty. That girl.」

「Yaotome-pro, what did you understand?」

「Yes. She has used Water Prison Orb as a distraction, and covered the surface of the whole ring with a thin layer of water membrane without anyone noticing. This means, even if she couldn't see with her eyes, she was able to determine contender Momiji's position from the waves caused by the shaking of water.」

In that case, it didn't matter if she could follow her with sight or not.



Shizuku would be able to tell Momiji even if she were to close her eyes.

「Ahh! Right now, contender Momiji has fallen on her knees! And the main referee gives the cue for the match to end! D-Block second round second match's victory goes to contender Lorelai Shizuku Kurogane! A big sigh comes from the venue! That's to be expected! The local Bukyoku Academy's top three that are called the Golden Generation have all been defeated! However, on the other hand, the three contenders from Hagun Academy have all advanced to the third round! The new Akatsuki Academy also has three victors left, displaying their presence! Don't take your eyes off in the third round at 18:00!」

“Hmm. As expected, she isn't so pathetic to be done in by the same technique twice.”

Snickering slightly happily, Stella, who was sitting on the pipe chair next to the bed where Ikki was sleeping, turned off the monitor.

And she reviewed on the Festival's situation up to then again.

The best eight had been determined right after Shizuku's match.

Well, accurately speaking, there were only seven people, with Stella advancing up to semi-finals.

Those seven people were all forces to be reckoned with.

First, Stella herself, her schoolmate Ikki, and Shizuku made up three.

After the new generation of Ikki's group and a new force of Akatsuki made their debut, the powerhouses were eliminated one by one, and Rokuson Academy's Panzer Grizzly Renji Kaga was still hanging in there.

The only A-Rank Knight on par with Stella, Sword Emperor of Wind Ouma Kurogane.

Using an unknown power to win without fighting in the second round, Bad Luck Amane Shinomiya.

And —

“The last is.....this pervert.”

As Stella looked down at her feet suspiciously, there was the girl wrapped up in bandages with disheveled hair, using her phantasmagorical Noble Art just like a kaleidoscope, obtaining an overwhelming victory, Sara Bloodlily.

Sara, who had been aiming to make Ikki her nude model, anticipated that he would be using the capsule for the recoil of Ittou Rasetsu and came to the Medical Room, but she was caught red-handed by Stella, who had also anticipated that to happen, the moment Sara was about to lift up his clothes.

However, despite conducting such act, Sara showed an expression of protest and complained to Stella.

“I’m not a pervert. Please call me an artist.”

“Calling you an erotist is more than enough! Geez, I can’t be careless or show any openings against you!”

“Why?.....Even though you cooperated yesterday.”

Sara’s words caused Stella to show a bitter expression



as she let out a groan.

“I-It’s true that I was unknowingly tempted by the devil’s whispers when you promised to draw the two of us in the palace, but I have cooled down after a day. Ikki’s portrait drawn by you would certainly be attractive, but after all, if Ikki dislikes the idea, then you can’t.”

“That’s why I’m trying to do this while he’s sleeping.”

“That’s even worse!”

Stella’s eyebrows rose in anger and stepped onto Sara’s back with her sole.

“Ow, ow ow ow.....! Breaking, I’m breaking.....!”

Although she didn’t exert that much strength, Sara leaked out squeals as if she was really in pain.

Sara became Akatsuki Academy’s member due to her out-of-standard strong ability, but she was not a combatant in the first place. With her unhealthy daily lifestyle and lack of exercise, and in addition to her inborn weak constitution, her body was not strong.

“Screaming from such little force, you’re weak.”

“I’m an artist, so I’m frail unlike a certain female gorilla who can weld bones.”

“You better watch your mouth. I’m still bearing a grudge against you all even before this matter about Ikki. I don’t know what I may do if you get too full of yourself?”

“Kyuuu~~~~~!?!?”

Stella’s veins bulged up as she pulled hard on the bandages that were wrapped around Sara, making her look like a boneless ham.

Being pulled by that extraordinary arm strength, the bandages mercilessly dug into her flesh, and her bones were starting to make sounds of grinding.

The originally weak Bloody Da Vinci could not endure it.

Well, as expected, even Stella did not have the intention of injuring a participant in the Festival

outside the ring, regardless of how much she hated the Akatsuki Academy. She let her go after a while and sighed in resignation.

“Haa. Why are you so fixated on Ikki’s nudity in the first place? If I recall correctly, I believe that Mario Rosso’s style was more wide-ranged?”





She painted not only character portraits, but also sceneries and religious paintings.

Her style ranged from abstract to figurative, a free painter not constrained by forms.

That was the Mario Rosso that Stella knew.

Even though she's like that, why would she be so obstinate on drawing a male's portrait, a nude one on top of that?

To that question, Sara went silent for a while, then answered.

".....There is a painting that I must complete, no matter what."

"Painting?"

Sara nodded.

"A certain person has spent his whole life to draw a painting of Messiah's salvation, but in the end, he was unable to complete it. For the sake of completing

it.....his assistance is necessary. My intuition shouted so.”

“Are you saying that you want to use Ikki as the model to complete that incomplete painting?”

“Nn.”

“Then you should have just asked Ouma. Their faces are similar, and his physique is superior. If it has to be nude, wouldn’t he be better?”

“Ouma is...different. It’s true that they look similar outside, but he does not have that gentleness. What he has is only the sharpened strength which deviates from normality. That.....the blank in that painting.....not suitable for the figure of the Messiah in the center.....Even you, if you are aiming to win in this Festival, you should not be content with being the second place.”

“.....Well, that’s true.”

“It’s the same as that.....Completing that painting is extremely important to me. I will not compromise. I don’t intend to cut corners. It’s the same as you guys

risking your lives to fight. Me as well, I am risking my life for the pain.....ting.”

Sara’s words carried on bit by bit.

Her voice was small, her pitch also hardly changed, but her words contained her firm determination.

Her unshakable and steel-like core was unimaginable, from looking at that weak body.

Seeing that, Stella.....improved her evaluation a little.

Honestly speaking, she did not dislike her.

A person who was straightforward for her goal.

“.....I understand your incessant passion towards painting. I will retract calling you an erotist. But it’s still unacceptable if Ikki himself objects. If you want to draw him no matter what, you need to somehow convince Ikki.....?”

Stella suddenly noticed while she was talking.

Under her foot, Sara was slightly trembling.

Her constraints should not be that tight anymore.....

“What is it? You are trembling.”

“.....Release me.”

“No. Because you are going to harass Ikki after I release you, right?”

“I understand.....then it's fine if you don't release me, so...”

“So?”

“Bring me a plastic water bottle.”

“Say that first————!!!!”

“And take off my panties.”

“Don't say that with this as pretext!? You can't cross that line as a girl!”

“This is nothing, it often happens in my Atelier when I



pull all-nighters.”

“Zip that mouth and stop saying anymore unnecessary things! Wait a bit! I’ll release you……!”

In contrast to the uselessly calm Sara, Stella was trying to untie the bandages wrapping around Sara in panic.

However,

(Eh, huh……how did I tie this again?)

She tied her up securely in the heat of moment, and did not know how to untie her at all.

However, she did not have time to worry about that.

“I-Is it here?”

For the time being, she just pulled a bandage.

Soon after.

“Kyaau!?”

The bondage strongly tightened, digging further into Sara's big breasts.

".....T-Tigh-tt.....Kuh."

Her lungs pressured, Sara gasped in agony with a teary face.

"S-Sorry! I made a mistake! Erm, then here!"

After that, Stella pulled the bandages wrapping Sara one by one, but they were all wrong.

Every time Stella pulled the wrong place, the bandages dug deeper and deeper into Sara's body, eventually rolling up the apron covering Sara's breasts.

It was a risqué scene where her apron was caught at the nipples and was barely covering them.

"I-It somehow became out of hand....."

".....I-If you tighten that much.....I will really.....leak out."

“NOO! You can’t leak! If you seriously can’t hold it anymore, then—!”

Stella raised a shriek as the situation kept getting worse and worse.

That voice echoed in the small Medical Room in the dome—

(.....Hmm?)

Ikki Kurogane, who was sleeping next to them, regained consciousness.

He rubbed his sleepy eyes and slowly raised himself from the bed.

“Hmm.....Huh, Stella, what are you doing?”

He saw the figure of his lover tightening the bandages wrapped around Sara’s voluptuous body as she was gasping in pain.

“Eh? Seriously, what are you doing!?”

“I-Ikki!?”

Seeing the awakened Ikki, Stella's expression further panicked.

How should she explain this bizarre situation?

However, it was literally a moment she could not waste.

That's why Stella omitted the explanation leading up to there and told him only the current situation.

"B-Bad news! Sara is going to leak, yet I can't untie the bandages!"

"I don't know how I should handle this situation, but will it be fine if you untie the bandages? Rather, if you can't untie them, then can't you just cut them?"

"T-That's it!"

Ashamed of herself for not being able to think of that due to her panic, Stella slid her *Lævateinn* between the bandages and Sara's skin, severed them apart and kicked Sara out of the Medical Room.

“L-Look! I released you now, so hurry up and go!”

“Nn.....”

After seeing off Sara, who was walking a weird gait towards the toilet, she turned around to face Ikki.

“Thank you, Ikki. Thanks to that, we have avoided the worst outcome.”

“Is that so.....It’s fine if that’s the case.”

“.....So, after resolving the problem at hand, I hope that you’ll let me explain how it led to that.....”

“No, I more or less understood.”

“Eh? Really?”

“I was confused a while ago because I just woke up, but seeing this situation made it obvious. And not to mention, it’s none other than you, Stella. Though not to the point of telepathy, I can still understand you to a certain extent.”

Ikki smiled as he said that.



Seeing Ikki's response, Stella patted her chest in relief.

Due to the unique situation, she thought that he might have a strange misunderstanding.

"I-I see. Then it's fine."

Stella was thankful for her highly comprehensive lover, as happiness bloomed on her face.

She was happy that the two of them could resonate without words.

Ikki gently held the hands of Stella who was showing such a loving expression, and spoke to her with an incredibly honest and caring gaze.

"Yes. That's why, Stella, do that only between lovers. I will never dislike you, regardless of what fetishes you have."

"Didn't you totally misunderstand——!?"

Her expression changed.

Shaking off his hands that held hers with all her might, Stella exclaimed.

That misunderstanding was indeed too much for a maiden to endure.

“Ikki, you’re wrong! You misunderstood! I don’t have the hobby of happily performing bondage on girls! That just happened due to a chain of events, or rather, considering the match in the afternoon, I couldn’t shave off her stamina with Illusionary Form, hence I had unwillingly used bandages, it’s not that I like……!”

Almost biting her own tongue in panic, Stella desperately explained the situation.

Seeing Stella like that, Ikki laughed as if he found it funny.

“I’m kidding. I know. You just protected me from Sara-san, right?”

“Wha! Y-You understood and still made fun of me!? Ikki is so terrible!”

Ikki intentionally played a prank on her.

After hearing that, Stella's cheeks puffed up as she stared at him in anger.

In return, Ikki poked her cheeks in a slightly mean gesture.

"It's payback for chasing me out of the room yesterday."

"Uu."

Stella had no words of rebuttal to that.

Rather, her anger was instantly replaced by anxiety.

Her thoughtless act might have made Ikki more unhappy than she thought.

Hence Stella inquired with her pupils swimming in anxiety.

".....Could it be that you are pretty angry?"

"Nope. Poking Stella's puffed up cheeks is fun, so I'm not bothered by that anymore."

“What’s with that? Geez…….”

Stella sighed in relief and pushed her cheek towards Ikki’s finger on her own.

It might’ve been a gesture which indicated that she had already reflected on herself.

After enjoying the feeling of her soft, blushing cheek, instead of using his finger, Ikki used his palm to stroke Stella’s smooth cheek.

Her skin was smooth no matter how many times he touched it, there was nothing to obstruct his fingertips.

The sensation felt like touching a newborn baby.

That’s why Ikki always ended up indulging himself in touching Stella’s skin.

However, Stella also seemed to like that action, narrowing her eyes from the pleasant feeling, and rubbed her cheek against Ikki’s hand for more caressing.

“Stella. You are like a cat.”

“Nya~♥”

Returning a joking response, Stella continued to act spoiled with Ikki.

A pair of lovers. Even a shallow and brief interaction was a time of happiness for them.

However.....That time was...

\*Clang\* The Medical Room door opened, and that time was ended as someone entered.

The two of them were startled by the sudden visitor.

On the other hand, the person who opened the door and entered took a glimpse at Ikki, whose hand stiffened on Stella’s cheek.

“.....Looks like the timing of my entrance is always bad.”



A voice lacking intonation, but scratchy and with heavy reverberation muttered.

The two of them could not respond to that voice.



No, they couldn't reply.

The shock was too much for them, so much that their thoughts came to a halt for a moment.

The reason was that the person before them was...

“N-No way.....!”

“F-Father.....!”

Ikki Kurogane's biological father, a Mage-Knight holding the nickname of Iron Blood.

It was Itsuki Kurogane.

## **Part 2**

“Y-You came to the event venue. I didn’t know.”

“This is a country-wide event. It’s only obvious for me, the head of the Japanese branch, to be here. Not to mention, my three children are participating in it.”

“T-That’s also true, a-ahaha.”

Ikki responded to his father who suddenly showed up.

However, his response was awkward and his smile was twitching.

That would not be strange. Since his father had seen his tryst of love with his lover.

That awkwardness was no joke.

Even Ikki as a guy was like that.

.....Sitting on the pipe chair next to Ikki, Stella already had a terrible expression on her face.

“~~~~~”

Her two small hands rounded into fists as she rested them on her knees, Stella was trembling with her head hanging down.

Her ears were bright red as if fire was about to spew out from her earlobes.

Her head was boiling from too much embarrassment, so much that her eyes were spinning around.

She thought that even the time when Ikki saw her figure as she was changing at the beginning was nowhere near as embarrassing as this. .

(Oh my gosh.....Oh my gosh.....!)

It still would've been better if it was anyone else, but of all people, it had to be her lover's father, whom she had not greeted even once so far, to see their intimate scene.

She wanted to kill the her from a few minutes ago who was saying “Nya~”.



She would definitely be thought of as an idiotic girl without a doubt.

It was probably the worst kind of first impression.

(Uwaa.....!)

To be honest, she only felt disdain towards Ikki's father.

He had caused countless problems for Ikki until then.

Stella could not forgive even one of them.

However, he was still her lover's father.

In addition, he was also the branch chief of the League of Mage-Knight Nations' Japan Branch.

Be it Ikki's girlfriend, or the second imperial princess of Vermillion, it would be bad if she was thought to be such an idiotic girl.

She had to recover herself somehow.

Her overheated head could not think straight.

Itsuki called to Stella who was disordered.

“Princess Stella.”

“Y-Yess!?”

Her face sprung up and looked towards Itsuki.

In that instant, Itsuki deeply lowered his head to her.

“Pleased to make your acquaintance, Princess Stella. I am Ikki Kurogane’s father, Itsuki Kurogane. My son has been in your care, I apologize for greeting you so late.”

(FFFFFFfather-in-law has greeted me fiiiirst!)

The girl who was greeted by her lover’s parent first.

Nevermind recovering herself, that was a big failure.

He had landed the finishing blow.

Failing time after time, something somewhere in Stella’s head gave out a *\*pan\** sound, and steam blew

out.

(W-What should I do at this time a-according to Japan's etiquette!?)

*Errm, errm*, Stella was desperately trying to think of how to show respect and sincerity towards seniors.

However, her embarrassment from the continuous failures, in addition to the invisible pressure of greeting her lover's parent, had overheated her head and she was unable to make a proper judgement.

"I'm Stella Vermillion! I'm nothing much, but please take care of me!!"

She used some strange Japanese language, and dogeza on the spot. (TL note: orz)

".....S-Stella, you were not supposed to say 'nothing much', but 'unworthy'. And dogeza may be a little too much....."

"Ah....."

Ikki's pointed out those issues in whispers, and

Stella's dizziness intensified.

In addition to hearing that unusual greeting...

".....Fu."

A small, but definite laughter, leaked out from Itsuki's mouth.

In the narrow and quiet Medical Room, Stella's ears had obviously heard that.

"~~~~~"

Stella's shoulders were trembling.

Tears dripped out as she thought of her miserable performance.

She wanted to erase herself.

And then, on her shoulder...

".....Stella. You don't have to be so tense."

Ikki's hand gently wrapped around her back and

supported her up with a hug while consoling her.

And then he stared at his father with a pair of sharp eyes.

“Stella is nervous from suddenly seeing you, father. Aren’t you terrible for laughing at her?”

Hearing his words, Itsuki honestly apologized in response.

“Ahh, sorry about that. I didn’t mean to laugh at you. Just .....I remembered that previously when you were detained, you also had practised dogeza for the sake of greeting Princess Stella’s father. I just find that a little funny.....Fu, aren’t you getting along well?”

“Wha, hold on, father!”

“.....Ikki did the same thing, too?”

“~~~~~”

As his embarrassing past was suddenly dug up, Ikki hung his head in shame.

That attitude confirmed Stella's inquiry.

(Ikki as well.....)

"Aha....."

The fact that the man who was consoling her with a cool face actually did the same thing at a place she didn't know about made Stella's cheeks loosen up.

Her wound-up tension was swiftly lightened.

Probably aiming for this timing, Itsuki again...

"Thank you very much for your polite greeting. Please continue to get along with Ikki from now on."

As he said that, he gestured for a handshake with Stella.

And Stella responded as if jumping at it.

"Y-Yes. Of course!.....Ah."

And then, the moment she shook Itsuki's large hand, she thought...

That rough and hard working hand was a bit similar to Ikki's.

The warmth that gradually transferred through it was similar as well.

(Somehow.....different from his image.....)

A more rock-like, inorganic and cold hand.....was what she imagined of that man.

After all, he was someone who had cornered his own son to that extent.

As the reality was different from her imagination, Stella was confused for a moment.

On the other hand, Ikki, whose shameful act was revealed before his lover, was a little embarrassed...

"So, why did father come here? Could it be that you're feeling unwell?"

He asked Itsuki, indicating a nuance of worry.



They were in the Medical Room.

The reason for coming here would probably be related to feeling unwell, was what he thought.

However, Itsuki denied that in his reply after separating his hand from the handshake with Stella.

“No. I’ve come here to look for you.”

“Me.....?”

“Ahh. As the head of Kurogane household, I have something to discuss with Ikki Kurogane.”

Not only Ikki, but even Stella showed a nervous expression to those words.

Up to then, whenever Itsuki..... the Kurogane house had made a move, it would not be anything good.

As such, Stella leaned onto Ikki’s arm, as if supporting him while standing.

A matter with the head of Kurogane household.

In other words, a matter with Ikki's family.

For an instant, she thought of stepping out as she was an outsider, which was a common sense, but...

(I'm no longer an outsider.....!)

Stella abandoned such thinking.

She was Ikki's lover.....no, family.

After the battle with Raikiri, their relationship became like that.

In that case, whatever the Kurogane household was going to do, she would protect Ikki this time.

She would not let him get wounded anymore.

As if displaying such intention, she stayed next to him, and chose to restrain Itsuki.

Itsuki also seemed to have read Stella's intention from her pair of eyes burning with will, and told them the matter without asking her to leave.

With his unique and lead-like heavy voice...

“Ikki. I am thinking of severing our father-son ties.”

A suggestion that would be the definite solution to all of the problems revolving around Ikki and the Kurogane household.

## Part 3

“Wha.....!”

The sudden proposition of severance caused Stella to open her eyes wide and shout out.

“Wait, why must that.....!”

“Winning the second match in the Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival.....Worst One, no, as Another one, among the best eight in the whole country, that holds a certain degree of influence. My existence as F-Rank is already known by many people, so even Kurogane household’s power would have difficulties with hiding my existence.....In that case, you may as well sever our relationship, something like that. Right, father?”

On the other hand, Ikki used a calmer voice than Stella to inquire for the reason.

Itsuki replied with a positive nod.

“.....It’s more or less like that. Kurogane is the household that has continued to maintain the order of

this country's Blazers since the era of Samurai. It would be troublesome if someone in that house was the first to break the code of order.

If you were to be treated the same as before, many people would probably start to 'Challenge' their own limits.

There would probably be people showing up, admiring you and setting you as their goal.

Your brave battles have a dangerous charm to evoke that, they lead to a certain temptation.

.....However, those reckless challenges or desires usually end up being harmful to both the individuals and the organization. Do you understand? You are an existence that is no longer 'Unbeneficial' to the Kurogane household.....Another One, Ikki Kurogane, has become 'Harmful' to the order."

"Don't speak nonsenseee!"

In that instant, Stella knocked down the pipe chair as she stood up, and raised an angry shout with her flaming hair glittering.

That pair of pupils was boiling with flame of anger as she yelled with intensity.

“I was foolish.....! I was a fool to think that you may be a reasonable person! You, are you still a parent!?”

Stella’s glare was more furious than that of a bloodthirsty wild beast, and overwhelming as well.

A weak-minded person would probably not be able to speak if she were to glare at them like that.

However, the other party was the man who held the duty of the branch chief of the League of Mage-Knight Nations’ Japan Branch.

Itsuki answered without a change to his tone despite Stella’s glare.

“Naturally.....However, before that, I am this country’s order, princess. I cannot let it waver, and I cannot let anyone waver it. I swear on my nickname, Iron Blood, as well as the name ‘Itsuki’, given by my father, I will continue to protect the strict order with my own hands.”

In contrast to the Stella's furiously bright eyes, his grey eyes were shining dully.

What dwelled in the depth of those eyes was the strength of his will, like steel itself.

The hardness of that will was more than sufficient to let Stella understand that it was pointless to talk to him.

"You.....!"

"Stella."

Ikki stood up and restrained Stella who was on the verge of rampaging.

"Stop it, Stella."

"But!"

"Thank you. You got this angry for me. However.....I hope that you can hold back here."

"~~~~~Kuh!"



It was none other than Ikki who dissuaded Stella, and she could not take further action.

She took out her anger that had nowhere to vent by punching the wall, and turned her back on Itsuki.

She probably wouldn't have been able to hold herself back, if she were to see him any longer.

Whispering another "Thank you" to Stella, Ikki walked towards Itsuki.

".....You aren't joking about it, right?"

"Of course.....This is a chance for you to break free from our influence. I do not have the free time, nor the interest, in interfering with the progress of an unrelated person. It is beneficial for both of us, I think that it's not a bad suggestion."

Itsuki's voice was totally serious.

In fact, just as Itsuki said, that suggestion had merit for Ikki.

They were already walking on separate paths.

It might be better for both sides if they sever their relationship cleanly.

However...

“Father. About that, I cannot just reply ‘Yes, understood’ so easily.”

Ikki avoided answering immediately at the spot.

Itsuki indicated that he understood that.

“Understood. I don’t intend to rush you. I will look for you on another day.”

After telling him that, Itsuki got up from his chair and walked out of the Medical Room.

A heavy atmosphere was lingered behind.

## Part 4

“I’m so pissed off! What’s with that guy!”

Stella yelled without reserve and threw a pillow at the door that Itsuki closed.

And then she stared at Ikki with bloodshot eyes.

“Ikki! Is that really your father!? Don’t you actually have some complicated background like being the child of a lover!?”

“But our faces are similar, and I believe that we are blood-related. Probably, should be.”

He didn’t have the confidence to answer back considering his treatment till now.

“Well, it’s not that I don’t understand what my father said. Since he is at the position of managing the Knights in Japan, it would be terrible if all the members started acting rebellious like me.”

Ikki added those words, as if following up on his father

to Stella, who was boiling with rage.

Stella made an obviously displeased face hearing that.

“What’s with you, Ikki? Aren’t you being really calm here? Even though he suggested severing your relationship with him.”

Ikki looked at Stella with eyes filled with love from her words, and replied.

“I guess. In the past, I would’ve been depressed, but I already have a girl who told me that she will ‘become my family’ at my side now.”

That’s right. He was already different from the time he was abducted by the Ethics Committee.

Even if his father were to sever their relationship, he still had a partner who had sworn to be his family.

That’s why he was shocked when he heard Itsuki’s suggestion, but he did not panic.

Because he had confirmed that a place he belonged to was next to the girl who was standing beside him.

“Ah, uu~~~~”

On the other hand, Stella turned her blushing face away from his straightforward trust.

She was aware that she was showing a really silly face right then.

Ikki looked at such a Stella with a smile and spoke.

“And also, to be honest, I think that such a day will eventually come.....No, essentially, this is something I would have to bring up with my father, about me leaving the Kurogane family. This is a problem that I cannot avoid, no, cannot run away from.”

That was how it would be for continuing to go against the Kurogane, something that he would have to settle in the end.

“.....Ikki intends to sever your relationship with that guy?”

“That’s what I intended.”

“Intended?”

His ambiguous words caused Stella to tilt her head.

“I was resolved to do that.....But for father to bring it up himself...”

He could not give an immediate answer.

Even though he clearly understood that there was no other answer.

As such, Ikki mocked himself.

“Why is it.....Even now, I can’t really hate that guy. Is this what it means to be unable to separate from parents?”

“Ikki.....”

But it’s alright. I intend to give him my answer in the near future.....No, the answer is already there. What’s left is to convey it. My path and my father’s will never meet. Since we will be parallel no matter how far we walk, I need to properly reach a conclusion.”

“Is that so?”

““!?””

The voice of a third person came from the gap of the door that was knocked ajar from the impact of the pillow Stella had thrown.

It was the girl who went out of the Medical Room before, whose neat facial features were wasted by her clothes, Sara Bloodlily, standing outside the door.

“You returned?”

“I waited outside since it seemed that you are talking about some complicated things.”

“.....I wish that you would use that common sense a little more on your TPO<sup>[1]</sup> for clothes.”

Taking a glance at the topless-with-apron body of Sara, Stella sighed in resignation.

“Sara-san. Did you want to say something just now?”



“.....Not really.”

Sara quietly shook her head to Ikki’s question.

She definitely muttered “Is that so?” when she walked in through the door.

That definitely meant that she probably had some opinion on Ikki’s issue.

However, she did not seem to be enthusiastic to voice it out.

In that case, Ikki would not ask any further.

They were not intimate to the point of asking for her opinion on his own matters, because she was not someone who he would open his heart to.

No, more than that —

“Instead of that, Another One.”

“I reject.”

“I-I haven’t said anything~…….”

“Even if you haven’t said anything yet, I can tell from your eyes!”

Although her face was expressionless like a doll, those pupils shone with desire and curiosity.

Those pupils were the same as the eyes of a wild beast, like when they had met at the party the day before.

As such, Ikki shot Sara down before she could say it.

Having her initiative taken away, Sara was at a loss.

However, she did not chase after Ikki with a half-hearted interest.

She had her own matters that she would not compromise.

That’s why she pulled herself together.

“Actually, I wanted to say that it’s fine if you don’t want to be my model. But you rejected that. Which

means.....”

“No means no, even if you bring out an elementary school excuse!”

However, Ikki did not pull back.

Rather, he could not pull back.

No matter how famous an artist she was, he was too embarrassed to be stark naked in front of others.

It was not a matter that he could accept with a straight face.

“No matter what you say, I will never be a nude model!”

“.....Uu~”

“Even if you show me a reproachful look, no.”

“Uu—Uu—”

“No matter how much you do it, no!”

Sara's shoulder drooped at Ikki's total refusal.

".....I understand."

"Are you finally giving up?"

"I will come again when you're asleep."

"You didn't understand anything! Although I already knew it!"

Ikki held his head and raised a sad cry.

That could not go on any longer.

Because of her, even if he locked the room.....no, even if he was inside a block of reinforced concrete, she was an ability user who could make a door and enter.

When such a person was targeting him, he could not sleep peacefully, even though he was in the midst of such an important event.

His relationship with his father, Itsuki, was one matter, but he also had to end his strange relationship with

that girl.

He had to make her give up, as soon as possible.

So, he grabbed the shoulder of Sara, who was leaving the Medical Room to “come again when he’s asleep”, and pulled her back.

“Wait a minute, Sara-san! No matter how many times you come, I will —”

However...

“.....Eh.”

His words froze.

The reason was because in the instant Sara turned back, her apron, which was the only thing covering her upper body, had its strap fall off...

*\*Boing\**

The two melon-like huge white breasts bounced out.

“Ah.”

“Kyaaaaaaaaaaaaa!?!?”

The one who raised a high-pitched scream was not Sara, but Stella.

She quickly dived behind Ikki and covered his eyes with her hands.

And she complained.

“I-Ikki! W-WWWWhat are you doing!?”

“N-No! I didn’t do it on purpose! After I grabbed her shoulder, it just.....!”

“Ah~, my apron strap has snapped.....”

Besides the two people who were making a ruckus with blushing faces, Sara was not shaken in the least, and murmured as she picked up the fallen apron.

Looking closely, the strap of the apron was torn.

“I think that it probably got torn when you were pulling around randomly earlier. That’s why it’s your

fault.”

“Uu. S-Somehow when you say that, I get the feeling that I might’ve pulled the strap.”

Then it was probably her fault.

No, no matter how she thought about it, Sara was in the wrong for wearing clothes that would fall off if one strap was torn.

However, Stella judged that it was not the situation to complain about that then.

“Anyway, cover yourself with that sheet over there first! Then give me the key to your hotel room! Since it’s my fault, I will fetch you a change of clothes!”





“Don’t have.”

“Did you lose it? Then tell me your room number and I will inform the reception.”

“It’s not that, I don’t have any other clothes.”

“Whyyy————!?!? Isn’t that weird for a girl!?”

“It’s because washing is troublesome.”

“That’s not the level of being simply lazy already!? And you called yourself delicate! You are the one who is like a gorilla! Ahh geez! Then I will give you one of my dresses as compensation, change into that!”

“Taking a dress as compensation for this kind of worn-out apron makes me look like a greedy woman; it’s too shameful, so no.”

“There is a mountain of other things that you should be ashamed of! I’m sure that you cannot take part in the next match wearing something like that! It will totally cause a broadcasting accident!”

“It’s alright. Since the strap is only a little torn, it can be used after tying a knot as emergency treatment.”

Saying so, Sara sloppily tied a knot with the torn strap, reconnecting it, and wore it back.

“.....See?”

And she showed a smug look to Stella.

At the same time, Stella felt a severe headache.

(N-No good.....! This girl has fatally mistaken the important point.....!)

The problem was not whether she could still use that tardy apron.

The problem was that such clothes would cause a broadcasting accident from the most trivial thing.

She did not seem to understand that at all.

She would probably wear that torn apron without any concern and appear for the match with Ikki.

And if she made any vigorous movements there?

Of course, the apron with only a sloppy emergency treatment would not be safe.

First, she would without a doubt be exposed.

If it was just that, it would still be fine.

If that girl's foolishness was broadcasted to the whole country, it would be a good thing to Stella.

However, what if, one in a ten thousand chance, the exposure were to cause Ikki's sword to dull, and affect the outcome of the match.....if it caused him to lose...

(I will absolutely not accept such a stupid result!)

It was no joke.

It was she who indirectly caused Ikki to be in a disadvantageous third round.

She could not let the anxiety factor increase anymore.

Hence...

“I have decided.....Ikki and me will go take a jersey, so you wear that first. Then, go to the department store wearing that.”

“The department store? You and I?”

“I will also bring a friend who is well-versed in fashion. We will buy your clothes there.”

“??? Why? It’s already fixed, so I don’t ——”

In that instant, along with an unusual sonic boom, something with a huge weight grazed past Sara’s ear, and stabbed into the wall of the corridor.

It was *Lævateinn*.

Shocked from the sudden hostility, Sara cowered.

Stella showed a first-rate smile towards her.

“If you jump around wearing those worn-out clothes, various things will also jump out, you know~? Well? If you insist? If you still iiiinsist on wearing that to the ring in the match against Ikki, even though I’m asking

you nicely like this, in order to prevent a broadcasting accident from happening in the slimmest chance.....I will burn the apron into your skin until it sticks on so that it can never be removed, would you prefer that?"

Stella's eyes were not smiling at all as she said that.

Sara was rendered incapable to scream, desperately shaking her head.

"Very well. Be a good girl and wait, alright? My smiling face is very cute so you may not know, I am currently in the worst mood possible, so I don't know what I might do if you run away, you know? Do you understand?"

*\*Nod nod nod nod!\**

Sara nodded with a pale face.

After Stella confirmed her consent, she left the Medical Room with Ikki, who was having cold sweat due to her coerciveness.

## **Chapter 9 - Warriors' Slightly Boisterous Break**

# 破軍学園壁新聞

キャラクターピックアップ

文責・日下部加々美

IKADSUCHI SAIJO

## 砕城雷

### ■PROFILE

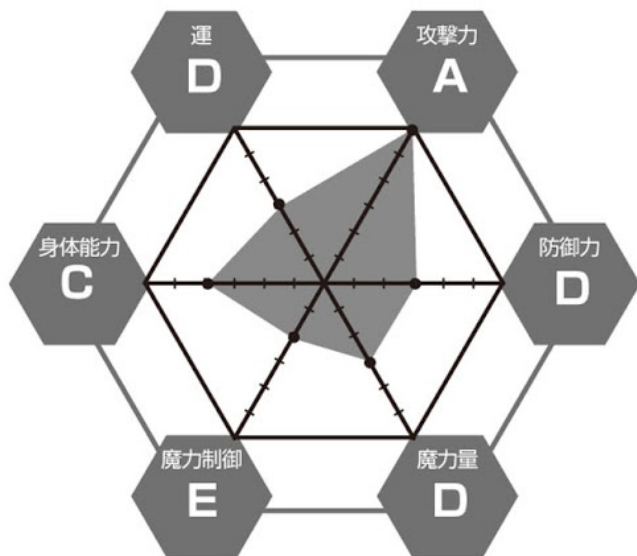
所属：破軍学園二年二組

伐刀者ランク：C

伐刀絶技：クレッシェンドアックス

二つ名：デストロイヤー城砕き

人物概要：生徒会書記



### かがみんチェック！



破軍学園校内序列四位の砕城先輩の能力は『斬撃重量の累積加算』。霊装である斬馬刀を振り回せば振り回すほど、斬撃のパワーが増すっていうわりとわかりやすく使いやすい能力だね。ただその使いやすさの一方で応用の利きにくい能力でもあるのが弱点かな。



## HAGUN ACADEMY WALL NEWSPAPER

Character Topics \_\_\_\_ Writer • Kagami Kusakabe

### **Ikazuchi Saijou**

#### ■ PROFILE

Affiliation: Hagun Academy, Year Two Class Two

Blazer Rank: C

Noble Art: Crescendo Axe

Nickname: Destroyer

Personal Summary: Student council secretary

Attribute chart (starting at far left, going clockwise)

Physical Ability: C

Luck: D

Offensive Power: A

Defensive Power: D

Magic Capacity: D

Magic Control: E

### **Kagamin Check!**

*The ability belonging to Saijou-senpai, fourth strongest in Hagun Academy, is the accumulation of attack power. The more he swings his horse-cleaving blade, the more power is added--it's a very easy ability to understand and use, isn't it? But that simplicity is also a*

*weakness since the ability is hard to apply in actual battle.*

## **Part 1**

After that, Ikki went with Stella to her room to pick out a dress.

Then they returned to the Bay Dome. Stella went towards the Medical Room where Sara was waiting, while Ikki went to the meeting place after contacting Arisuin along the way.

The waiting place was at the third entrance of the Bay Dome.

Once Ikki arrived, Arisuin, who was at the bench in front of the fountain, waved his hand.

“Ikki. Here, here.”

Ikki jogged towards them after being guided by the voice.

Sitting next to Arisuin was Shizuka, who looked like a high-quality doll.

“Sorry for calling you out all of a sudden, Alice. Oh, Shizuku also came.”

“Wherever Onii-sama goes; be it into a fire or a bath, Shizuku will join regardless.”

“Stop that.”

“Fufufu. It’s a joke. As expected, going into a fire would be troubling.”

“What I am troubled about is not that.....But is it alright? Shizuku has another match today. I think that it’s best to preserve your stamina.”

More importantly, it was about the third round battle at night.

The one who would be competing for the victor in D-Block against Shizuku was the one who had already won two consecutive matches without fighting, a member of the Akatsuki Academy, Bad Luck Amane Shinomiya.

An eerie contender who possessed Nameless Glory, a bottomless causal interference ability that could bend all causal effects to his wishes.

Since he was her brother, it was natural for him to be worried about her.

However, Shizuku returned that worry with an elegant smile.

“It’s alright, Onii-sama. Shizuku has a grand secret plan.”

“Now that you mention it, you seem to have said that before. I have not heard of the details though.”

“Yeah. As it concerns the outcome, the details cannot be revealed to Onii-sama after all. But it’s alright to not worry about me.....Or rather, doesn’t Onii-sama also have a match? Even though your opponent is that Akatsuki’s exhibitionist, you want us to go to the department store with her. What exactly happened?”

“Ahh, that’s.....”

Ikki explained the sequence of events to the doubtful Shizuku.

About how Stella had torn her apron.

And how Sara still intended to wear that apron to the match.

And how it was decided that Stella would bring her to the department store after half-threatening her.

“Certainly.....Stella-san can be unexpectedly attentive.”

Shizuku commented with an impressed feeling after grasping the situation.

Though he felt that some parts were unnecessary, Ikki nodded without touching on that part.

“Honestly speaking, it really helped me. If she had fought in that attire.....it would’ve been hard for me to fight.”

He did not intend for that to disrupt his concentration.....

No such intention, but.....he had no confidence.

Even Ikki was a young man, so it was a physiological phenomenon that could not be helped.

“I see. So that’s the reason you called me.”

“Un. Alice is well versed in that, right? That’s why I hope that you can teach Sara-san the joy of dressing up, or at least wearing a minimum amount of clothes.”

His skill in makeup and coordinating clothes could

clearly be understood from seeing Shizuku.

If she saw her own figure after he seriously coordinated her clothes, Sara might also get interested.

And then once she was interested, she might not show up topless before others anymore.

That was what Stella considered.

Ikki also agreed on that point.

He believed that the fundamental feeling of shame was non-existent in Sara.

She wore an apron to avoid the paint, it could count as having a minimal amount of clothing to cover herself with, but she would probably go out without even wearing an apron if she was not drawing.

He could not understand the reason as to why she was like that.

She was that much of a genius. It would not be strange if one or two wires in her head were connected differently from normal people.

Or rather, she did not understand the concept of

wearing clothes as it was shameful to be naked in the first place.

Then, what they could do was.....only to rouse her interest.

They could only make her like the act of dressing herself up.

In consideration of Arisuin's feelings, Ikki asked him apologetically.

Arisuin, on the other hand, showed a refreshing smile and positively replied.

"Sure. It's true that I was once part of Akatsuki Academy and their comrade, but I have not met with them directly."

The only ones Arisuin had met directly were Puppeteer Reisen Hiraga and One Armed Swordsman Wallenstein who originally came here as a teacher of Akatsuki Academy.

Hence, he said that it would not be awkward.

"Also.....That girl only became like this due to her negligence of health and tardiness, but she's like a



gem in the rough. I also have the motivation.”

“It really helps if you say that.”

“.....Even so, I’m astonished. That exhibishionist is still aiming for Onii-sama. I will do another drop kick on her stomach when she arrives.”

“I-It’s not a good idea to do that to someone who is having a match today.....!”

While getting cold sweat at his sister’s disturbing words, the three of them chattered as they waited for Stella and Sara to arrive.

However, those two had still not arrived even after they had waited for a while.

Ikki looked at the time on his student datapad.

It was already five minutes past the meeting time.

(Speaking of which, they are really slow.....)

He acknowledged that the preparation for girls was slow, but in Sara’s case, it was just putting on clothes.

More or less considering that she also had her preferences, they even prepared four sets.....

(Could it be that she had already awakened to dressing up and took her time to pick out the clothes, or something like that?)

If that was so, then it would help save the talk, but.....

Meanwhile, as Ikki was thinking about that...

“Ah. Stella-chan and Sara have come.”

Arisuin stood up after seeing those two coming out of the third entrance of the Dorm.

Ikki and Shizuku also stood up and welcomed them.

However.....as they shortened the distance, Ikki felt something wrong.

Somehow, Stella was not energetic.

“K-Kept you waiting.....”

Nor was her voice full of spirit.

Her back was also hunched, she seemed to be really tired.

“.....S-Stella, you seem somewhat worn out? What happened?”

As he asked if something happened...

“T-That’s.....”

Stella glanced at Sara who was brought along.

Sara’s attire was just a jersey.

Just hearing that did not seem to suggest any sex appeal.

However, the impression of her cleavage peeking out from the zipper opened up at her chest betrayed that.

Although this attire should not have anything to do with sex appeal, wearing it sloppily only added to that sensation.

They could see that the passersby also took glances at Sara’s cleavage.

“It’s not good for a girl to be wearing such a shameful attire. You’re not Fu○ko-chan<sup>[2]</sup>, so close up the zipper properly.”



Arisuin complained about her appearance and zipped up the jersey up to her neck.

However, the instant he let go...

*\*Jijijiji.....\**

The zipper returned to its original position after opening up with that noise.

“O-Oh my.....”

“The chest area is too tight to be closed up. Other dresses had their buttons pop out, so nothing worked out.”

“Ugu!”

Stella leaked out a groan as if Sara’s words were brass knuckles that punched her stomach.

Ikki also understood her reason for feeling down from that appearance.

“I s-somehow understand the reason why Stella is like that.....”

“.....I t-tasted a humiliation that I have never

experienced before.....”

That’s probably true.

Girls with chests as big as Stella were not common.

Even in Hagun Academy.....probably only Kanata Totokubara could match her.

“My condolences.”

“Honestly speaking, I may feel depressed for a while.....”

Stella, who became groggy from an unprecedented psychological impact, had her waist bent like a granny, trembling all over, and raised her face in agony.

And then.....she suddenly stopped moving.

Stella stared straight at Shizuku, who was in front of her.....

“—Now then! Since everyone has gathered, let’s hurry up and leave for the department store!”

Her back suddenly straightened up, as she announced with vigor.

“Stella-san, where did you look just now to recover yourself?”

“Now, we don’t have much time because the match is at night! Let’s make haste!”

“Stella-san, please answer honestly. Since I will kill you.”

## Part 2

It took a twenty-minute-long bus trip from the Bay Dome to reach a certain large downtown street.

Three large shopping malls whose names everybody knew faced one another; it was a fierce battle zone in the middle of commercial metropolis Osaka.

Ikki's group reached the JR station which overlooked those three shopping malls and alighted the bus at the rotary.

“”” ..... “””

The expressions on the five of them were all worn out after the ride.

Even though they didn't walk here.

That reason was...

「Kurogane-san! I am definitely going to Hagun next year! Please remember me!」

「Thank you very much for your signature, Stella Onee-sama! I will treasure it for the rest of my life!」



「Shizuku-chan! Please look over here again! With those despising eyes —!」

「Everyone, I will be cheering for you! Please do your best!」

The windows of the bus were all fully open and a group of middle school students stretched out their bodies and waved their hands.

「Dear passengers, please do not lean your faces outside of the windows!」

Ignoring the driver's pitiful warning, those girls continued to wave their hands at Ikki's group with their eyes glittering in admiration.

That's right: the five of them shared a bus with some middle school students that were moving in a group for some club activities or such, and were asked for signatures and handshakes, receiving a one-sided admiration from those students as they were swarmed upon them.

Even their friendly smiles as they saw off the bus were cramping up.

“This is.....I have underestimated it.”

As Ikki murmured with a sigh, Stella nodded as she fixed up her disheveled hair with her fingers acting as a comb.

“U-usually, they’re not so persistent.....today is really above the norm.”

“I’m sick of people.....I’m feeling sick.....”

“Are you alright?”

Sara rubbed Shizuku’s back, who had a poor complexion.

If it was the usual Shizuku, she would have put up a strong front to people other than Ikki and Arisuin, but...

“Mu, thank you very much.....Uu.”

Shizuku, who had originally already disliked crowds, was further showered with praise and admiration, causing her to be too fatigued to be able to put up a front.

“Well, they used to hold back for privacy reasons, but now everyone is in a festive mood.....Not to mention,

there are four out of the best eight in the Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival gathered here. This development should've been expected."

All of them nodded to Arisuin's words.

However, that regret was a little too late—

*\*Dodododo.\**

A sudden rumbling noise resounded in the five's ears.

As they raised their heads to see what was happening...

""""Eh?""""

「Oi over here, over here! They are in front of the bus stop!」

「Kya —! Ikki-kun in person! Just like the information on Tweeter mentioned!」

「Quick, let's share this with everyone!」

「Stella-sama —! Please shake hands with me —!」

It was literally a 「Human Wave」 that was rushing towards Ikki's group from the shopping mall, where

they were heading to, towards the bus stop where they had alighted.

Someone, or possibly everyone on the bus that they rode.....had probably leaked Ikki's group's location onto the Internet.

“Information society is scary –”

“Now is not the time to look afar to escape from reality, Alice! If we don't do something, someone will get injured!”

“C-Certainly, with such a number of people, if someone fell down, it will be terrible.”

“However, Onii-sama, what should we do to calm them.....”

「Breasts! Imperial princess's breasts! With such a number of people, we can do it!」

「Must try to touch them in this commotion!」

「Aim for the s-switch at the center! Center switch!」  
(TL note: Yeah, you perverts. It's the nipple of course.)

「Shizuku-sama! Please use your adorable little feet to step on me –!」

““Let’s kill them, for the time being.””

“C-Calm down, you two! I understand your feelings, but you will be expelled at once if you do that!”

As Ikki was calming down the rising killing intent of the two, he made a suggestion at the same time.

“Anyway, let’s escape! If we were caught by that number of people, let alone buying clothes, it wouldn’t be strange if we couldn’t make it back by the time the match begins!”

However...

“That may be a little too late.”

When they turned behind after hearing Sara’s voice, people sprang out from the station behind them with mobile phones in their hands, wanting to get a closer look at the best eight in the whole country.

In other words, they were surrounded on both sides.

“Well, if it’s like this, it doesn’t seem possible to escape.”

“It can’t be helped.”

“Yeah. At first, I didn’t want to resort to violence, but it can’t be helped.”

“The expression of you two is not ‘it can’t be helped’ though, but rather, it’s filled with killing intent!?”

(What to do? At this rate, it will really turn into a bloodbath.....)

However, Ikki did not have any alternatives.

As far as he could see, with the tension over there, they would not listen to him properly.

What should he do?

Just as he was in a dilemma...

“.....In short, it will be fine as long as those people cannot see.”

As Sara told him, she took out her device *Brush of Demiurge* and palette.

“What are...”

‘You doing?’, before Ikki could ask her, Sara had

already finished her business with a god-like hand speed.

As she mixed the paint on her palette to grey color...

“Color of Magic — Stone Grey of the roadside.”

She then painted it onto the back of her hand.

In that instant, Ikki’s group who were at that place felt that they could no longer focus onto Sara.

The Color of Magic Noble Art that controlled the concept associated with colors.

One of those was that stone grey.

Those who were painted that color would make themselves difficult to be noticed, just like a stone at a roadside.

It was to the point of being unable to sense the existence itself by anyone except those like Ikki’s group, who were knights that routinely trained their concentration.

.....They did not receive an explanation about that technique from Sara, but they all felt it themselves, and understood the effect of her Noble Art. At the

same time, they also knew how to handle the current situation.

“I see. It would be fine to use magic and make myself invisible. I never thought of this since I have never used it this way.”

“.....If there is another way, then it can't be helped.”

As they murmured somewhat disappointedly, Stella and Shizuku closed their eyes...

“Flame Veil.”

“Blue Fantasy.”

Along with the chants, Stella using heat, while Shizuku using water, they each deployed a membrane to bend the light.

They made their figures unseeable only to the crowd.

It was an application for those two who both had excellent magic power control.

“As expected, these three are skillful. Then I will use my ability to make Ikki's shadow thinner.”

Arisuin deployed his Device, *Darkness Hermit*, as he said



so.

His ability was to control the concept of shadow.

If he used that power, it would literally make the shadow thinner, possible to obtain temporary stealth against people.

Originally, they were not allowed to use their ability in public areas, but at this rate they were bound to cause a major incident.

Ikki also did not point that out as he understood it. However...

“No, it’s fine.”

Ikki declined Arisuin’s assist.

“Oh? But Ikki’s magic is unable to do it, right?”

“Well, that would be the case if it’s about magic, but it’s more than enough to handle normal citizens with just my body control.”

As he answered such, Ikki turned his focus to the gazes of the human wave pushing towards them.

Then he read the gaps of blind spots, thinner than a

string, from all those paying attention to him, and strolled in there.

Ancient Stepping, Trackless Step — he used it against the opponent that was the crowd, with their gazes filling almost every corner.

Not a single person noticed Ikki who was travelling against the human wave.

His vision that could pinpoint the blind spot of that many people's' gazes, and the body control technique that did not make a single millimeter margin of error, caused Arisuin to be astounded.

“Oh my. Your stealth makes even an assassin lose face. I’m really amazed by you, Ikki.”

Leaking out a voice of admiration at Ikki Kurogane’s bottomless technique, Arisuin followed after those four.

Once *Darkness Hermit* permeated into his own shadow.....that shadow immediately thinned out.

At that moment, the figure of those five people, who had gained the attention of every person gathered there, disappeared.

「H-Huh!? Not there!? Disappeared!?!」

「Hey wait a minute! What do you mean!? Ikki-kun is not there!」

「That's strange. They were there just a moment ago, huh?」

The confused crowd made a commotion as the five people suddenly disappeared like smoke.

With their targets lost, the passion that had nowhere to go soon dispersed after stalling in place for a while.

There would probably be nobody who would get injured anymore.

Seeing that, Ikki's group passed through the crowd of hundreds of people right from the center, and entered the shopping mall.

## Part 3

After the five of them entered the nearest shopping mall, they took the escalator to the sixth floor where female clothes were sold.

Coincidentally, it was the 'Summer Lady Fashion Exhibition', so some partitions of the whole floor were temporarily removed.

"Heeh. There's quite a variety of stores."

"They also seem to be displaying limited overseas brands during this Exhibition period."

Shizuku had supplemented Stella's impression after looking at the flyer that was given out at the entrance of the floor.

The human traffic during the Seven Star Sword-Art Festival had increased to an amount incomparable to the usual times.

When would they make a showdown if not then?

In another sense, it was obvious that the shops on the whole floor would give it their all during such an

event.

“If there is such a variety of clothes, you are sure to find one you like! Now, let’s hurry up and go browse around!”

However, Sara simply showed an unmotivated expression to Stella’s instruction.

And she randomly grabbed a nearby piece of clothing.

“.....Then this will be fine.”

“Eh? You have already decided? Huh, this is a negligee! It’s what you wear for sleeping!”

“It’s fine if I can wear it.”

“There is a big problem! This is pretty much see-through! The image won’t be shown if you wear this with your proportions! Don’t just randomly pick, choose properly!”

“.....Muu, then this.”

“What? Now it’s not even clothes anymore! This is a belt! Just a belt!”

“It can cover my breasts if I wrap it around myself.”

“Wouldn’t that just make you look like someone who has a unique sexual fetish!? Make sure to choose clothes, only clothes!”

“I got it. I will choose properly after looking.....I’ve made my choice.”

“In the end, it’s an apron!? Are you somehow cursed to only wear aprons naked!?”

“It’s quick to wear, quick to take off, and feels cooling too. It’s the best choice from a logical perspective.”

“.....I wonder if that is what it feels like after marrying a husband who has no interest in food.....”

Next to Stella, who was holding her head, Arisuin mumbled ‘You’re right’ as he held his chin with his hand.

“This is even more severe than I had expected it to be.”

Her reason for wear clothes was at a somewhat obligatory level.

It would be a truly difficult challenge to make her interested in fashion.

However.....

“Are you able to do it somehow?”

“Well, leave it to me.”

Arisuin believed that there was no way that there wouldn't be a method.

If there was no reason to wear them, he just had to give her one.

“Hey, Lily. Why are you not interested in fashion?”

“.....There's no reason for me to decorate myself. Since I don't really have anyone to dress up for.”

“However, you want to make Ikki your nude model and draw him, right?”

“So?”

“Then, isn't that a reason?”

“?”

As Sara tilted her head in confusion, Arisuin got closer to her ear and whispered with an evil expression.

“Make yourself pretty and become cute.....you just need to make Ikki fall for you.”

“Wha, A-Alice!?”

“W-WWW-What are you saying!?”

Hearing bits of Alice’s disturbing words, Ikki and Stella changed their expressions.

The friend who knew about their relationship was trying to create a discord between them.

That was probably an obvious reaction.

However, Sara also knew about their relationship.

“.....That’s impossible. Another One already has Crimson Princess as his lover. It’s not possible for him to fall for me.”

She showed disapproval to Arisuin’s suggestion.  
However...

“Ufufu. That’s not true, you know? Man is a creature that says ‘I will only love you for my whole life’ but will easily have an affair. Lily is a famous painter, so you should know, right? Even Zeus was like that, so it isn’t



certain that Ikki, who is just a human, won't have an affair. Not to mention, this country also has a nonsensical saying that 'Affairs are the proof of a husband's worth'."

".....Really?"

"Yeah. You just need to work hard and make yourself pretty, then snatch Ikki away, see? Won't you be able to draw him all you want if that happens?"

"....."

Arisuin looked like the Serpent that was tempting Eve, gradually guiding her into the taboo.

Stella could not keep quiet about that anymore, and interrupted the two.

"A-Alice! Don't teach her strange things! And Sara, don't make that 'maybe I will try working hard a little' face! Ikki is my boyfriend, got it!? S-Seduction is immoral, it's absolutely not allowed!"

However, Arisuin only showed a provocative smile towards Stella who had interrupted him.

"Oh my, oh my~? Isn't this opinion really unlike Stella-

chan?”

“W-What do you mean?”

“Do you think that you have won after becoming a couple? I thought that Stella-chan would say something like ‘I will continue to capture Ikki’s heart with my charm, so try snatching him away if you can’.”

“Guh.....!”

Stella slightly wavered after Arisuin’s provocation.

Shizuku, who was observing her until then, slid in and hugged Ikki’s arm like a tangling ivy, and dealt another blow to Stella.

“Well well, there’s nothing as unbearable to watch as a woman who has turned prudent. A female should chase after a more charming male. And a male should chase after a more charming female. Even though this is a philosophy similar to the survival of the fittest in the law of nature, saying things like morality, clinging onto concepts that humanity has arbitrarily made on its own, you are a pretty boring woman.....Onii-sama, women will fall into depravity like that. It’s better that you abandon her now. This woman will become

someone who will not do housework, just watch TV drama while lazily lying around when her husband is working hard, and she'll waste all the savings on stocks and investments. Of course, Shizuku will not become someone like that."

"Grr.....!"

"G-Geez, Alice and Shizuku, don't bully Stella so much."

Ikki also joined in as he couldn't bear to watch it anymore.

In the end, if Ikki had no such intention, there wouldn't be any affair in the first place.

And Ikki was confident that such a thing would be impossible.

That's only a matter of course. How would he be unsatisfied with such a wonderful girl beside him, a girl that he was unworthy of?

Hence, Ikki said those thoughts out loud...

"Stella, you don't need to take them seriously. My feelings will absolutely—"

“Wait, Ikki.”

“Mugu!?”

However, those words were physically blocked by Stella’s hand.

Sealing Ikki’s words, Stella spoke.

“.....Just like those two said, I was wrong.”

“S-Stella?”

“I understand what Ikki was going to say just now, but Ikki saying those words himself and me forcing you are two entirely different matters.”

Stella cautioned herself in her heart.

Did it mean that she had won if she became his lover?

It was absolutely like that.

.....She felt that she had become too dependent on their relationship after it was revealed recently.

(In the first place, I don’t have the qualification to suppress the girls gathered around Ikki.)

Of course.

Ikki Kurogane was a man loved by none other than Stella Vermillion.

He was that charming of a man.

In a sense, it was only obvious that those who knew about his story and received his gentleness would come to like him.

.....In addition, if she kept making a fuss with 'I am her lover, that's why!' to every single person that got close to him, it would not be elegant at all. It was not charming.

(If I relax just because of our promise, I will be finished as a woman.....!)

It was the heart, and not the promise, that bound the lovers.

To keep on loving him, and keep being loved by him.

Only by working hard like that, could she honestly accept Ikki's words— !

"Fine! Sara Bloodlily! Do as you like if you feel like it! I

won't stop you! But I won't let you steal him! Ikki's heart only belongs to me, Stella Vermillion!"

As she thrust her finger high in the air to make her declaration of war, Stella immediately left the group and walked towards the exhibition by herself, not wanting to waste a single moment.

She was probably thinking about how not to lose to Sara who had Arisuin to coordinate for her.

"Since it's a rare chance for me as well, then, Onii-sama, see you later."

After Stella, Shizuku also walked away by herself.

Seeing off those two, cheerful giggles spilled out from the mastermind, Arisuin.

"Ufufu. Ikki sure is being loved."

Before his gaze as he said that, was Ikki who was fuming in anger.

".....A~li~ce."

"Aww, don't show such a scary expression. You're ruining your cute face."

“How can I not get angry? You purposely provoked Stella since you know that she hates losing.”

“It can’t be helped. This was the only reason I could think of for Lily. And I mean every single thing that I told them as well. Ikki also doesn’t want to chain Stella-chan down with just some promise, right?”

“.....Well, that’s also true.”

After hearing his explanation, Ikki couldn’t make a rebuttal either.

He also didn’t want to chain Stella down with a promise.

“Then I will bring Lily around, but do you want to come along as well?”

“.....No, Shizuku also seems to have gone before I know it. Since I also have something I want to buy, I will be going there.”

“I see. Then in two hours, let’s meet up back here. I will also mail everyone.”

## **Part 4**

As the shops were having a showdown, it could be seen that the contents of the exhibitions were very diverse.

From casual wear to formal dresses, there were even native outfits as well.

Three floors of the department store were used to display lady wear from classic to modern, Eastern to Western.

The main goods were displayed using mannequins that attracted attention, pushing for the summer's trends and brands.

A mild milky-colored one-piece.

A refreshing striped flared skirt.

Even just seeing those brought about a joyous mood.

However...

“.....It's cute, but...”



It was not something like that.

Stella thought that it was weak.

Not to mention that her opponent had Arisuin.

Shizuku appeared to be three times cuter the last time he seriously coordinated for her.

As Sara didn't even bother coordinating herself, she might have an even greater potential.

The mainstream ones she held in her hands.....putting it in a negative way, they were ordinary choices. She was slightly worried.

.....However, going too far into the unorthodox path would also be dangerous.....

“Oh?”

At that moment, the melancholic Stella was attracted to a corner of the exhibition.

What she saw in that section was 「Chill! Yukata Summer Exhibition! (You may try them on)」 written on a pamphlet.

It was a corner specially for handling yukata.

“This may be good!”

It was a mainstream one, yet highly unexpected choice.

It was also a proper choice for the season, and she did not have to worry about clashing with Sara, since she was going to wear clothes with ease of movement in mind as she was going to use it for her match.

In addition, as Stella did not have a single set of kimono, it wasn't a bad chance to buy one.

Stella made up her mind and walked towards the corner.

And after browsing through the merchandises that asserted beauty, she eventually picked one out.

It was a yukata with a red and white base which matched with her hair color.

She released Flame Veil as she took it into her hands.

Then she walked towards the shop attendant.

“Excuse me. I want to try this on.”

“Welcome. You want to try it on, right? Then this way.....!?”

In an instant, the middle-aged woman attending her froze her expression.

Because she realized who the person talking to her was after seeing her face.

“Y-YYY-You are, could it be that you are Vermillion’s Princess Stella? W-Why have you come here!?”

“Like I said.....Umm, I want to try this on.”

“A-Ahh! That’s right! That’s what you said! Our shop has that service! I forgot about it as I was too surprised! T-Then please, wait a moment! I will prepare tea and some tea cakes! Saitou-san! Please go and buy some top-grade tea cakes and tea! The most expensive ones!”

“No, you don’t have to do that! There’s no need for that, please let me try this on!”

Stella stopped the middle-aged woman who was trying to take out her wallet from her pocket to let her colleague nearby buy tea and tea cake in a hurry.

“I came with my friends today, so I can’t stay for long. But I appreciate the thought.”

“S-Sorry for my impoliteness. We have no experience in receiving state guests, s-so I got a little overexcited.....ahaha.”

“I’m just a student now. Please, do not mind.”

“I understand. Then please wait in this dressing room. I will help you try it on immediately.”

She was guided to the partitioned space in the middle of the kimono corner.

Its size was about twelve tatami mats.

Stella went through the entrance hidden by the curtain and walked towards the center.

And then, she saw a familiar figure.

“Is that Shizuku? Why are you here?”

In the dressing room that Stella entered, Shizuku was already inside before her.

“Is there any reason other than trying on clothes?.....Since it’s such a rare chance that Stella-

san herself is allowing others to tempt Onii-sama, I was thinking of showing Onii-sama my appearance in yukata after such a long time.”

“Gunu.....”

Stella frowned as the reply was just as she expected.

Even though she purposely made a choice that wouldn't clash with Sara, she clashed with a different side.

However, Stella would not retreat as her feelings were already put into the kimono.

“I don't remember you ever being considerate though.....Fuun. Well, just do what you want. Since it will be fine as long as I can win over Ikki's heart.”

Hearing Stella's powerful declaration, Shizuku showed a meaningful smile.

“Heh.....I will need to congratulate you on that, huh?”

“Mu? What do you mean?”

“Even though I have chosen a yukata, you are going to choose the same. Are you sure that's fine? You won't stand a chance, you know?”

“Y-You don’t know that if you don’t try it out first!”

“Pfft. Well, that’s true. You will know when you try it.”

(W-What’s with that overly confident attitude of Shizuku.....)

Even Stella knew very well about how competitive Shizuku was.

However, rather than saying she was competitive, she believed that there was some sort of certainty in her.

(But, I also won’t lose!)

She had experienced a moment of insecurity, but Stella still received the yukata from the female shop attendant and tried it on.

As expected of the shop attendant delegated to that showdown period, it took almost no time for her to smoothly finish assisting Stella wear the yukata.

“Alright. It’s finished. How is it, Stella-sama?”

“Wah~!”

Confirming her appearance after they were done with

it, Stella raised an excited voice.

The yukata Stella chose had bright red thistles with a tint of yellow decorated over a white base.

Her shoes were changed into geta<sup>[3]</sup>, and she carried a string purse in her hand.

Her obi was of a red darker than that of the thistle, tied in a big knot around her waist.

“It’s so cute, just like a goldfish.....”

She turned her body around once, the big knot swayed just like a goldfish’s tail.

Stella liked that very much.

She would probably stand out if she wore that to stroll in a festival.

And, at that moment...

“Heeh. It looks pretty good on you, Stella-san.”

Shizuku, who had finished wearing hers at almost the same time, praised Stella.

Shizuku’s outfit was a yukata, just like Stella.

Her blue fabric had white iris and ripples of water drawn on it.

In contrast to the lively tone of Stella's, hers was a calm color tone.

It had a synergic effect with Shizuku's mild colored hair and skin, showing a level of coolness.

.....Hence, perhaps because of that...

".....?"

(H-Huh? Somehow.....)

Seeing Shizuku's appearance, Stella felt that the insecurity in her heart inflated.

She confirmed her own appearance again in a panic.

And although she still didn't know the reason, she definitely felt it.

(.....Compared to Shizuku.....it doesn't really seem to fit me.....)

"Pffft. You seem to have noticed it yourself, Stella-san."



“Wha! What are you saying, I wonder?”

Shizuku hit the bullseye, and expected Stella’s panicked reaction.

“You don’t have to play dumb. Compared to me, it doesn’t seem to suit you, isn’t that how you are feeling?”

“T-That’s not true! Rather, mine is definitely cuter!”

“I see. Then let’s return to Onii-sama together.”

“Guh.....”

That would be troubling.

She could not appear before Ikki while holding such insecurity.

However, why did it seem not to fit her as well as Shizuku?

She stood before the full-length mirror and looked at herself after changing various poses, but she couldn’t think of the reason.

Hence, Stella asked the female shop attendant who

helped her to wear it.

“H-Hey shop attendant-san. Between me and Shizuku, who do you think fits better?”

“E-Erm.....”

That question was probably troubling considering her standpoint.

The female shop attendant showed a vague smile as if to dodge the question.

“Both of you have worn wonderful clothes that brought out your own personality, I think that they fit really well.”

That answer came from her heart.

In the first place, Stella’s original looks were already outstanding.

She could wear most of the clothes.

However, the shop attendant had noticed one issue.

“It’s just that, the person over there feels more used to wearing a kimono.”

“Used to.....”

“Exactly.”

Shizuku confirmed shop attendant’s words.

“I am still a woman from an honorable samurai family. As I prefer dresses personally, I usually wear what I want, but I had plenty of chances to wear a kimono in the past for family events. And at the same time, I have received training for how to behave myself when wearing a kimono. I will not mess the hems like Stella-san when walking, neither will I look straight at the other person.”

“.....!”

Shizuku pointed her finger at a spot.

Looking at the hem of the yukata, it was indeed messed up after moving around in front of the full-length mirror.

“You must straighten your back when talking to another person, but show some reservation in your gaze instead of looking straight at the other party. The position of your hands must not exceed your shoulder line, and aligned at the front. Individually, everything

makes a small difference, but after accumulating together, it has a bigger impact on the impression. Kimono is different from a dress. It's not good just be glamorous, only by using your inner beauty along with it will then let you reflect the Japanese beauty. —In other words! Both your body and your movements are lacking in modesty!”

“Hauu!”

Exactly. In the first place, kimono was a clothing nurtured from combining Japanese culture and physique.

Which meant that to Shizuku, it was a home game, while to Stella, it was an away game.

The difference was obvious.

And it was not difficult to imagine that every one of the actions they'd make would increase the gap.

The weight of accumulated training would show itself in the slight angle of their postures and reflexive actions.

It was not something that could be imitated in a short amount of time.

Stella had also received training for table manners when wearing a dress, so she understood that well.

“.....Certainly, this won’t work.”

“That’s not true at all. It also looks very well on Stella-sama!”

“.....Thank you very much. However.....”

‘Very well’ was no good.

She had to win.

That was a battle with a woman’s, Ikki’s girlfriend’s pride on the line.

There was still Sara, who would be coordinated by Arisuin, awaited.

It would not do to lose against Shizuku there.

It would probably be better to give up on the kimono.

However, what else would there be?

Stella was troubled. And to her...

“If you are fine with it, how about letting me

coordinate for you?”

Shizuku said that as she gracefully walked closer to Stella and whispered near her ear.

“You will?”

“The other side has Alice helping. Even if I help, it shouldn’t be a problem, right?”

However, Stella only showed her a suspicious gaze after hearing that suggestion.

“.....You’re full of lies. It’s impossible for you to help me. You’re probably just thinking of some evil prank. I won’t fall for it.”

Considering their relationships that were like between a bride and her sister-in-law, it was only obvious that she would react as such.

However, Shizuku showed a rather depressed expression hearing that.

“I’m really not trusted. Well, considering Stella-san’s perspective, distrusting a sister-in-law like me is obvious, but saying that much still makes me feel a little depressed.....I have acknowledged Stella-san to

some extent despite how I feel, you know?”

“.....Really?”

“That’s right. Otherwise, I would have never allowed you to be together with Onii-sama. I would use all illegal means possible and chase such a woman all the way to the end of the world to eliminate her. Stella-san should know that I’m that kind of a woman, right? However, since it’s you.....for the first time, I acknowledged another woman. But because of that, I am very displeased when that country bumpkin woman is buzzing around Onii-sama, and is even aiming for his body. I won’t allow the woman I had acknowledged to lose against her.”

“Shizuku.....you.....”

“Won’t you let me help? —Onee-sama.”

Shizuku held Stella’s hands by overlapping hers and requested.

She called her with a term she had never used before.

Stella’s eyes flickered in delight after hearing that word.

She didn't know that she was acknowledged to such an extent by that girl.

Hence, Stella grasped back Shizuku's hands and replied with a smile like fully bloomed flower.

"I'm sorry for suspecting you! Let's chase away that woman together!"

"Yes.....!"

"Then let me hear Shizuku's opinion immediately! What do you think is the outfit that will make me the cutest?"

"It's simple, Stella-san.....That red hair of yours that seems to be on fire. That feminine body shape even kimono could not hide. You don't have to dress up at all. You are already very charming in your original appearance."

"I-Is that so.....Ehehe. Somehow, hearing those words from Shizuku makes me happy."

"In other words, Stella-san just needs to make use of the weapons you were born with. And the best choice to go with that is this!"



“T-This outfit is.....!?”

“Since it’s a festival, various clothes will be displayed. I have procured this for Stella-san’s sake. A woman like Stella-san will be able to wear this perfectly. And in addition to that, if we mix in some wildness as spice.....you will be able to catch Onii-sama’s heart!”

“For my sake.....! Thank you, Shizuku! This certainly feels like it will do! Alright! Let me change into this quickly!”

## Part 5

As for the other two, it was around the time Stella and Shizuku had made an alliance.

Sara and Arisuin took the escalator to the floor below the lady's outfit department.

On the way, Arisuin asked Sara just in case.

"We don't have much time, so I want to hear it from the start. Do you have requests like 'this kind of design is good' or 'this brand is good'? Or will you leave everything up to me?"

Sara shook her head and answered.

".....I don't understand much, so please."

"Okay."

(.....That being said, there is a match today, so clothes hard to move in are NG<sup>[4]</sup>.)

Not to mention, Akatsuki was a private school without a school uniform.

The clothes chosen there would just become her battle attire.

Overly decorated clothes would reduce her mobility.

That would not be good.

Although he was once in Akatsuki, there wasn't any particular lingering feelings, so it didn't really matter to Arisuin anyway, but to Ikki.....that serious youth would probably not be happy about it.

However, regardless of which clothes they might choose...

There was something he had to do before that.

".....Whatever we may need to do, first is your face."

"Orthopaedic?"

"We won't go that far. However, since your original face is good-looking, it will be a waste to go without makeup. Therefore.....we first start from here."

As they were having that conversation, they reached the cosmetics department on the third floor.

Milky-colored marble.

Golden lines drawn on the black pillars in some of the areas.

On the floor that had a clean feeling and chic color tone, the unique fragrance of female cosmetics wafted around in the air.

“Let me ask for the sake of it, do you have experience in makeup?”

*\*Furu furu\**

Sara shook her head.

“Well, that’s true. You don’t have a fashionable aura.....”

Her hair still had bed hair paint sticking to it. Her lips were also dry.

There was no way she had used any makeup before.

(It’s incomprehensible that her skin does not have a single flaw, though.)

Well, she probably had that kind of constitution.

It was not as mysterious as Stella’s weight.

“Then you also don’t have any knowledge about makeup and skin care, right?” (TL note: Me neither, so you should appreciate the pain of translating all those knowledge.)

“I never did it myself, but if it’s about puffing some skin-colored powder onto your face, then I know about it.”

“You are talking about foundation. But I will tell you just in case, makeup is not just about that.”

“Is that so?”

“Yeah. Since it’s a rare chance, I will teach you from the beginning. Please listen carefully.”

“Got it.”

“First, before putting on makeups, it is important to do skin care. Use this cleansing foam to remove the dirt and oil from the sebum. If there are any impurities, the makeup will not be able to stick well, so this is a necessary process.”

“I see.....”

“Next will be this toner’s turn. This has many active

ingredients that will maintain the moisture of your skin.”

“Hmm hmm.....”

“After that’s done, next is the lotion. Lotion contains reagents that retain the elasticity of your skin. Its usage is mostly similar to toner. Finally, don’t forget to apply this day cream to confine the active ingredients from the toner and lotion onto your skin.”

“.....”

“After covering with the day cream, apply the base makeup next for the sake of improving how well the makeup sticks. This is very important as it also has the effect of protecting your skin from UV light. At this stage, you need to use different control color in accordance to the state of your skin for the sake of adjusting its color. Use purple type if you are concerned about the redness of your skin, use silver type if you want to show its glossiness. After coming this far, it’s finally the foundation’s turn that Lily spoke of. But this puffing of powder foundation Lily spoke of has other types apart from powder such as cream or liquid and it is important to use either one based on the skin type of the person but if there is still any

spots or acne that cannot be hidden by the process up to this point then use concealer to reinforce and lastly use face powder to suppress the stickiness of the foundation followed by the finishing touch of highlighter and blush which can be used in either sequence depending on case-by-case and now we are finally done with base make up so the next is eye makeup but I wonder if you have understood so far?" (TL note: The lack of punctuation is on purpose.)

As he looked at Sara, white smoke could be seen rising up from her head.

And then Sara answered Arisuin's question with dead-fish eyes.

".....I understand that living as a woman is very difficult."

"Oh, you are unexpectedly good at comprehension. That's right, a woman is always putting in tremendous effort into making herself beautiful everyday. Men call that deception and don't really understand those efforts."

".....You are also a man....."

"I'm a maiden at heart."

“.....Weird person.”

“I don’t want to hear that from you.”

It was truly regrettable.

“.....Somehow, I don’t feel like I can do it properly.....”

“Well, I just explained the process in great details, but there are products that can cover lotion, day cream and base together, so it’s unexpectedly manageable. As the saying goes ‘practise makes perfect’, let’s run through it once for a trial run, for the time being.”

As he said that, Arisuin snapped his finger.

His thinned shadow regained its color immediately.

He released his *Darkness Hermit’s* presence blockade.

In that instant...

“The beautiful mister over there, are you buying a present for your girlfriend~?”

It didn’t take even three seconds before a young female shop attendant went to Arisuin’s side.



Sales performance would directly affect personal evaluation in those kinds of places.

Hence, they tend to flock to the customer like piranhas in Amazon after taking one step in.

A weak-willed person would be pressured by the shop attendant's spirit to go along with the flow like that, and probably get eaten to the bone before they realized it. (TL note: Metaphor using piranha to indicate the salesperson wringing out all the money the customer has.)

However, as expected of Arisuin who was used to it.

Unfazed by the shop attendant's attack, he stated his needs with a smile.

"No. I am just accompanying the girl over there who wants to choose some makeup. However, it seems that she has never even applied a toner before."

"Not once until now!? And yet she still looks so pretty!"

Noticing Sara's existence for the first time after looking at the pointed spot, the female shop attendant

stated her honest thoughts with a slightly surprised expression.

“But if she’s so pretty, it would be a waste not to do any makeup.”

“I know, right? However, since she has never done any makeup before, she totally has no idea what suits her skin.”

“I see, I see. If that’s the case, could you come over to the counter, please? I will show you all of the samples of our cosmetics.”

“Thank you. That will be helpful.”

That female shop attendant probably had no interest in the Seven Star Sword-Art Festival.

She did not realize that Sara was a contender even after seeing her, and was able to speak smoothly.

Arisuin received bags of samples and brought Sara out of the shop.

What he received was the sample set from an organic cosmetic maker.

“Are these all free?”

Sara's eyes went round after seeing the samples contained in those beautiful little bottles that would not lose out to the products on sale.

"Yeah. Since makeup also has compatibility with certain people, most producers will provide samples to try out. Some of them also offer refunds."

".....So generous."

"Depending on the content, this small bottle can worth up to ten thousand yen. Organic cosmetics aren't risk-free either, so customers wouldn't take the risk if they didn't offer this much."

As expected of the cosmetic sample set targeted towards female customers, there were many pretty items that also gave a feeling of unity.

Some people even became sample maniacs after being charmed by those small items.

.....That would seem to make the sample lose its meaning.

However, there were maniacs regardless of what world it was. There was no point worrying about that.

“Fumu. There is a blindspot from the camera over here, so it will be alright.”

Arisuin used his observant eyes from his career as an assassin to determine the position of the surveillance camera and calculated its range of sight.

Seeing through the blind spot instantly, and bringing Sara along, they entered the shade at the edge of the floor, where the surveillance camera’s blind spot was located.

And then...

“Hermit’s House.”

He struck the wall of the department store with the blade of *Darkness Hermit*, and pulled it down just like that.

A dark hole opened up that seemed similar to unzipping a zipper.

“Now, enter it.”

Sara followed Arisuin’s words and stepped into the dark hole.

Passing through the black veil, there was a six tatami wide room in a monotone color.

“.....This place is?”

“The other side of the world using my shadow’s ability.....In other words, its a hidden room made using the space between the shadows. You can’t just put on makeup in front of other people, right?”

Although electricity couldn’t be used, water supply and gas were available, and there were even some rations prepared.

If he felt like it, he could hide for a few days in that convenient space.

That was also the place where he had confined Kagame after assaulting her some time ago.

“Here is the washingroom, please come.”

Washing the face was required before putting on makeup.

In the case of Sara, who had never done any skin care before, it was not just washing, peeling.....removing the old stratum corneum was probably also a

necessary process.

Hence Arisuin brought her to the bath unit deep inside the Hermit's House.

On the way, Sara suddenly stopped on her tracks.

And she asked him with a doubtful expression.

“.....Why are you helping me?”

“Oh. Don't you feel like polishing a gem that can shine brightly if you find one?”

“You should have betrayed us.”

“It's true that I have betrayed the Rebellion. And I don't intend to move for them a second time.....But that and helping you as an individual are different matters. Of course there is also the matter of being requested by Ikki and the others, but Lily doesn't have an unpleasant smell either.”

“Because yesterday was the day I used the shower.”

“No, I didn't mean it that way.....More importantly, what's with the 'the day'!? A girl must shower properly everyday!”

As Arisuin sighed in amazement, he continued.

“.....The smell is a metaphor. Most of my life was rough, so I can tell. The rotten sewage-like smell that those trash who willingly fell into the corruption have.”

Terrorists that were called Rebellion overall had various backgrounds.

For example, people like Puppeteer who executed evil acts, survivors like Tatara who lived through an environment where they didn't know anything other than evil.

.....Arisuin did not believe that those two evils were the same.

The former was already beyond saving, but the latter was.....just a victim of circumstance.

Because there was no such thing as equality in life.

Arisuin, who had crawled through the bottom of the snow town, understood that very well.

That was why he would not differentiate people by the organization they belonged to.

He would only rely on his own sense of smell that he

had developed over the past ten years of his life.

“As long as my sense of smell does not reject Lily, there is no reason for me to hate you.”

“.....I see.”

“Speaking of which, rather than me helping you, I want to hear something from you instead. Mario Rosso is a famous artist that even I know, so why are you working as an underling for Rebellion?”

Sara shook her head to deny that question.

“I have no intention of joining Rebellion. I’m just.....repaying my debt.”

“Debt?”

Sara nodded in affirmation.

“There is a painting that I want to finish no matter what. But before I can paint it, I need to go around the world to widen my knowledge. I have to find my ideal model.....For that sake, I received an operation from Grand Professor for my illness. I sold my paintings to pay for the treatment fee. I also borrowed their route to enter into conflict zone to look for my model, that’s



the entire relationship that I have with them.”

The reason she was participating in this battle was also one part of her search for her model.

She wasn't interested in the Rebellion's ideals, either.

She was just using Rebellion for her own objective, and Rebellion was also using her for their own benefit.

Sara explained that her relationship was just like that.

“That's how it was.....But in that case, you have been ripped-off. I don't know what kind of operation it was, but considering the value of your paintings, they were probably worth enough money to buy a country.”

“I don't care about that. If I can get my hands on the body I want to draw, I have no need for money. There's nothing else I want.”

Sara's voice was plain and emotionless.

However, its will was heavy.

Arisuin understood that that was the weight of her determination.

It was probably so important that it would be very

difficult to replace that.

It was heavier and stronger than what had Arisuin had expected it to be.....he caught a glimpse of a kind of sadness in Sara's thoughts, and felt a bit guilty for using that feeling.

".....It would be nice if you could finish it."

"It took quite a long time, but I finally found my model. I will definitely finish it."

"You're talking about Ikki, right?"

"Yes. Devils crawled over every part of the painting. The figure of a Messiah who is standing bravely without fearing anything, with unparalleled braveness and a maiden-like pure gentleness, he is an existence possessing these two contrasting impressions. He is an ideal representation of a male."

.....In order to find that, Sara had travelled around the world.

And she finally encountered him.

"The moment I saw Another One, my senses started screaming out. He is exactly the existence that I was

searching for.”

Sara’s expression as she was talking seemed somewhat feverish.

As if, it was as if.....she was showing off her lover.

“Fufu. Which means, it was love at first sight.”

.....? Is that so?”

“Because, in other words, Ikki is the ideal male to Lily, right? Isn’t that the same as a woman falling in love at first sight?”

Sara was confused by what Arisuin pointed out.

“.....I don’t understand.....Since I have never considered such things before.....”

Did she fall for Ikki?

Even as she asked her heart, she could not get an answer.

It was the same as not being able to understand the meaning of a foreign language when hearing it for the first time.

It was an emotion that a girl's heart, which was like a bud without knowing the 'L' of love, could not understand.

## **Part 6**

The first to return to the place for meeting up was Ikki.

Since apart from him, the others were all girls(?), he knew it would probably take some time, after all.

Hence Ikki sat on a resting bench nearby, and read a literary work he bought from the book shop as he waited for the female group to return.

It was around five minutes after the promised time.

“Sorry. Did I make you wait?”

He heard Arisuin’s voice.

Ikki closed his book and looked up.

“No, I didn’t wait that.....”

And...

(H-Huh?)

He stiffened from doubt.

Standing next to Arisuin was Sara.

She probably had been coordinated by Arisuin. That outfit was not a jersey, and of course not a topless apron. She was also wearing a brassiere properly. Rather, her brassiere was totally exposed. Moreover, she was wearing a pair of denim hotpants remodeled from jeans, and her overall exposure had only increased.



“.....U-Umm, Alice.”

He questioned him with a glance that said ‘What is the meaning of this?’

Arisuin sighed in response to Ikki’s confusion.

“I understand what you are trying to say.....I worked hard, you know? However.....”

He explained.

How it became like that.

It wasn’t anything complicated. There was a plain and simple reason.

After finishing her makeup, when they were choosing her outfit, she randomly tried on a pair of jeans designed towards summer female wear. Of all things, Sara suddenly collapsed. Then she said with a pale face.....

「H-Heavy.....」

“Simply put, it was weight overload. I also heard that because Stella-chan was scary, she was forcing herself to wear that jersey. But she eventually used up all her



strength.”

“Isn’t that way too weak!?”

“I was also surprised.....”

“.....Because I have never carried things heavier than my brush.”

“Sara-san, how have you actually managed to live until now.....”

“However, I have put in effort within her weight allowance so that she doesn’t look like an exhibitionist. You don’t have to worry about *that* bouncing around when moving if she’s wearing a bra.”

Arisuin went behind Sara as he was speaking, then grabbed her by the shoulders and pushed her towards Ikki.

He signaled him to see it for himself.

Well, certainly, he didn’t take notice because of the sudden increase in the exposure rate, but Arisuin had put in a lot of effort into Sara’s outfit.

Her upper half consisted of a show-off bra and long sleeve summer cardigan.

Her lower half consisted of hot pants and boots.

The front of her cardigan was not closed up, showing the appeal of her hourglass body line from her bust to her thin waist. The choice of her sleeves was a long type that covered up to the second joint of her fingers, her bed hair was left as it was, and the whole style had enhanced Sara's sexiness and downer atmosphere. It was as expected of Arisuin.

In addition to all that, her makeup was also perfect.

Her white skin gained elasticity with the use of toner and lotion, and her eyelashes were beautifully curled. The exquisitely used highlight and shadow shaped out Sara's facial features, and her previously dry lips had the freshness of a ripened fruit, radiating vividly.

There was no oversight, no excessiveness, everything was in just the right amount.

Honestly speaking.....he thought that she was beautiful.

".....It's strange, after all?"

"Not at all. This is definitely better than before. You're

really pretty, Sara-san.”

“.....I see.”

Ikki relayed his impression directly to Sara.

Sara replied indifferently and averted her gaze, but.....her averted gaze wavered slightly, her cheeks faintly dyed in the color of cherry blossoms.

It seemed like she was embarrassed.

That was the first time Sara behaved like a girl.

“As expected of Alice. Doesn’t she look a lot better?”

The voice directed to Sara was Shizuku, who was just returning a while after their meeting time.

Shizuku was walking towards them with *\*karan koron\** steps wearing geta, taking small steps so that her hem would not get messed up.

Then she leaned next to Ikki’s side as if saying that it was her spot, and grabbed his sleeve with her small hand.

“Shizuku, did you buy these clothes?”

When Ikki asked her about the clothes that were different from a while ago, Shizuku nodded in delight.

“Yes. Since I still have not used the reward from the time we defeated those terrorists in the department store before, I bought this. How does it look, Onii-sama?”

“An iris pattern, huh? Looks good with the cool colors. It really suits you.”

As Ikki answered Shizuku, he patted her silver hair with just enough strength so as to not mess up her hairstyle.

“Thank you very much for your compliment.”

Shizuku gave her gratitude, feeling happy as she narrowed her eyes.

However, at the same time Ikki’s hand stopped patting her, that expression.....changed into an evil smile.

“But Onii-sama must be looking forward to Stella-san the most, right?”

“Eh, n-no.....that’s...”

“You don’t have to make excuses. Wanting to see the cuteness of the person you love is an obvious thing.”

As Shizuku said that, she turned towards the path she came from and called out.

“Now, Stella-san! It’s time for the finale! With your charm and cuteness achieved thanks to that new outfit, beat the new contestant over here to a pulp!”

“Leave it to me!!!!”

The reply came from an empty space.

No, she just made herself invisible with Flame Veil.

Stella immediately released her Noble Art that had bent the light, and jumped out before Ikki.

And then...

“I’ve become a cute bunny-chan and I’ll jump into Ikki’s heart pyon♪”

With bunny ears attached onto her hairband, and clad in fishnet tights, she hugged Ikki in her bunny girl appearance.

“““\_\_\_\_\_”””

In an instant, everyone went dead silent.

Nevermind Ikki, even Arisuin and Sara, as well as the passersby had lost their words and expressions after seeing the rather bizarre look of Stella.

“Fufufu. Shizuku, look, Ikki seems unable to even utter a sound from my cuteness!”

Only she herself had not noticed.

Ikki put his hands on the shoulders of that overly positive Stella, and pushed her away.

Then.....looked far away and spoke.

“For the time being, please change your clothes, Stella-san.”

“Huh!? Your way of calling me seems somehow distant!? I didn’t jump into your heart!?”

“Pffft.”

“!”

Mocking laughter came from next to Stella.

As Stella turned around, she saw that one girl mocking her with her eyes dyed in pleasure of sadism.

Seeing that figure, Stella's face immediately paled.

".....Shizuku, you, don't tell me.....you deceived me!?"

"Saying that I deceived you, pffft, how disreputable. Please think for a bit. In the first place — I will never become your ally."

"Then, then 'because Ikki likes rabbits, the bunny girl outfit will get lots of points' was also.....!"

"That kind of bonus exists only in Dragon Quest."

"~~~~~!!!!"

Realizing that she had been toyed with by that little devil, Stella's face boiled from shame and anger.

"Y-You! Ikki, you're mistaken! I was deceived by Shizuku."

"Un. I know. I know already, so please change your clothes, Vermillion-san."

“Noooo! The distance between our hearts is widening at an accelerating rate! It became somewhat like the time when we first met ———! Guuu! Shizuku! You will get it from me later! Remember this ———!”

Stella cried out in anger, and ran away with her hands hugging her own body.

She probably wanted to change back into her uniform.

Behind Stella’s back...

“Pffft. Aah, so funny.”

Shizuku’s shoulders shook as she laughed.

“Hey, Shizuku. Don’t bully Stella too much.”

“NO.”

Ikki cautioned Shizuku as he couldn’t bear to watch it anymore, while Shizuku rejected him without any hesitation.

Ikki was slightly surprised at her strong rejection, which was rare considering that she fundamentally abided him all the time.



“A-Are you so unwilling to the extent of a curtly rejection?”

“Yes. This is my special authority, I won’t stop even if Onii-sama asks me to stop.”

As Shizuku answered Ikki as such, she looked towards the place Stella ran off to again.

“.....Pffft. Really, such a cute person.”

The side profile of Shizuku as she muttered such.....for some reason, stabbed at Ikki’s heart a little.

(.....Huh, why is it, this?)

He was confused by that incomprehensible feeling.

What did he feel when he saw her side profile just then?

Love?.....Or was it sorrow?

He couldn’t understand. And then, while he was still unable to reach an answer...

“—Then Onii-sama, I will retreat before the cute bunny-chan becomes a red demon and returns. It’s

about time for me to make arrangements for the round three battle tonight.”

Shizuku informed Ikki that she would be returning first.

.....There was no reason to stop her.

Even more so if it was an arrangement for the night.

Currently, there was nothing else more important to them than that event.

Hence, Ikki pushed aside the pain in his heart out of his mind, and nodded.

“Got it. I will appease Stella.”

“I leave it to you.....Alice, I hope that you can help me, do you want to come together?”

“Yeah, it’s alright. My work over here is done as well.”

“Thank you. Now then, please excuse us, Onii-sama.”

“Goodbye. Please return on time before the match begins, ok?”

Shizuku and Arisuin left the group together.

As they were leaving, Ikki looked at Shizuku's distant figure...

"I'm looking forward to fighting you in the semi-finals."

He said so with his cheering included.

Shizuku turned back once after hearing that, then after using her loudest voice to reply "YES!", she took the elevator with Arisuin and went off.

.....And then, after a few minutes, Stella returned after changing back into her uniform.

"Huh? Where's Shizuku and Alice?"

The first person she looked for after returning was of course Shizuku, who was going to receive her vengeance.

However, Shizuku was probably no longer in the building. Ikki told her about that...

"She had to do some warm-ups for the round three battle, so she returned.....fir.....?"

*First.....he stiffened again.*

Why?

He received another strong impact to his brain, even stronger than the bunny girl costume before.

The source of that impact was in the arms of the angry Stella.

What she hugged there was.....an infant sleeping with eyes closed.

“I guess she ran away, huh.....that brat!”

“S-Stella, that.....infant is?”

“Did you give birth to him?”

“No way!”

## Part 7

It happened after Stella took off the bunny girl costume and changed into her uniform.

「Annoying bitch annoying bitch annoying bitch! Today, I will absolutely not forgive that woman! I'm going to use Ar○ Alpha and stick cat ears on her head when I return!」

With a half-crying face, Stella, who was enraged by Shizuku, was checking her attire before the mirror by the sink, in that moment—

Suddenly, an infant appeared without a sound in a space diagonally above her back that could be seen in the mirror.

「——!？」

She was so shocked that she held her breath.

However, there was no time for her to stiffen up.

That's because the infant that appeared from nowhere was falling due to gravity.

「Dangerrrrr!!!!」

“.....And that’s how it happened.”

“You did a great thing.”

After that, the three of them brought the infant to the lost child center in the department store, then sat down at the sofa inside the center and waited for the guardian of the infant to be found.

As for the infant.....a boy probably not even one year old, was sleeping in Stella’s arms at the moment.

Stella lowered her sight onto the infant and asked Ikki next to her.

“.....This child is a Blazer, right?”

Ikki nodded.

“Probably. I think he probably has a teleport type ability similar to Jougasaki-san.”

If not, there was no other way for him to suddenly appear out of thin air.

Normally speaking, Blazers’ abilities were discovered after they had gained their egos, but amongst the

possessors of strong abilities, during their infantile period when their egos were still blurry, there were occasions where a portion of their ability suddenly activated even though they didn't materialize their Device.

The infant who couldn't even stand on his own had no control over his abnormal power.

.....That was of course very dangerous.

It could endanger his life, depending on where it happened.

In the case back then, if Stella hadn't caught the infant and if he had hit his head onto the hard ground as he fell, causing a heavy injury.....in the worst case, he could have died.

"It's really great that Stella was there."

"That's true.....I wonder if his parents can find him soon."

"I wonder about that. We don't know what was the extent of this child's ability when he awakened it."

If they were lucky, his parents might be in this

department store.

However, depending on the situation, it was also possible that he flew over from a place far away.

Seeing that 「Makoto Nitta」 was written on his nameplate, it wouldn't be wrong to say that the infant was a Japanese, then in the worst case, they were probably in Japan.

“However, since we have already contacted the staff of the department store, let's leave him to them and only stay with the infant for as long as our time allows.”

“That's true.....Ah.”

It was at that moment.

The infant in Stella's arms twisted his body and opened his eyes.

“Aa, bu.....?”

And then his big and watery eyes saw Stella's face as she was carrying him—

“Bueeeeeeeeeeeeeeee~~~~~!!!!”



He cried out loudly.

No, it was not only that, he wriggled his small body around, trying to escape from Stella's arms.

It was probably because he began to panic after not seeing his mother's figure.

"H-Hey! Don't flail around! It's dangerous!"

"Byaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!!!"

"W-WWWWhat should I do!? What should I do, Ikki!?"

Despite being kicked in the face, Stella still hugged onto him to prevent him from falling down, and asked Ikki for help.

However, Ikki also didn't know how to approach an infant.

Although Ikki had Shizuku as his little sister, they were only one year apart.

For the time being, he tried out the classic 'peek-a-boo'...

"Byaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa~~~~~!!!!"

"S-Somehow it got worse!?"

“H-How troubling.”

The two of them looked at the infant, who had no intention to stop crying, worriedly.

As if breaking through between those two...

“Give him to me.”

Sara took the infant from Stella’s arms.

“Sara!? You have no stamina, so it’s dangerous! What are you going to do if you drop him!?”

“Shut up. You are a bit too loud.”

“Uu.”

Stella tried to snatch the infant back in a hurry, but was restrained by Sara’s never seen before strong gaze.

She sat down on the sofa, and as she stroked the back of the infant’s head...

“It’s alright. Your mama will return soon.”

She spoke in a calming tone.

Soon after...

“Au, au?”

“He stopped crying.....”

Surprisingly, the infant that was rampaging a while ago had calmed down.

“You’re amazing, Sara-san. Are you used to it?”

“Not really.....It’s just that I have observed various things during my trip around the world, so even without words, I can somehow understand what he wants, how he feels.....This child is feeling insecure because his parents are not here. If at this time even we become unsettled, it will increase his insecurity. Therefore, we have to calm down. Even if he is a child, he is sensitive to an adult’s emotions.”

““S-Sorry.””

Being reprimanded with a criticizing gaze, Ikki and Stella lowered their heads in apology.

Children would also feel insecure and scared if the adults were in a bad mood.

Certainly, it was as she said, it would not be good if they were unsettled too.

Although she felt some frustration as a woman, as well as concern about Sara's arm strength, it would seem that leaving the infant to Sara was the best solution. Stella had decided so and pulled back her arm that was trying to snatch the infant back, then made preparation in case Sara were to drop the infant at some point.

And a while after calming down, the infant started rubbing against Sara's breasts.

"U – pai! Pai!" (TL note: The incomplete word Issei loves the most)

Stella spilled out a smile unconsciously at that lovely gesture.

"Ahaha. I also know what this means."

He probably wanted breast milk.

"But sorry, we can't produce milk yet."

"I will get some milk from the staff-in-charge here."

The considerate Ikki was about to stand up, at that

moment.

Sara took a shocking action.

She pulled aside the show off bra Arisuin had chosen for her, and exposed one of her white breasts.

“Buh!?”

“Wai, Sara!? What are you—”

“Quiet.”

Sara stared at Stella who was making a loud noise from the sudden shock, and scolded her.

“Ah, s-sorry.....but.....!”

“.....Although I can’t produce milk, I believe that doing this will give him a peace of mind.”

Just like Sara said, the infant, who was sucking on Sara’s nipple even though no breast milk would come out, showed a satisfied expression.

He was definitely not hungry.

What the infant was seeking was not food, but warmth.

Sara understood that, as she had the observant eyes of the world's number one artist.

And then, as Sara was imitating breast feeding to the infant...

“Ninna nanna ninna oh; questo bimbo a chi lo do~  
♪”[5]

With a beautiful voice, she started singing.

Stella, being well versed in languages as an Imperial Princess, immediately understood that it was in Italian.

An Italian lullaby.

“Se lo do al lupo bianco; me lo tiene tanto tanto.”

A melody that was weaved with love.

The infant wasn't able to understand its meaning.

Even so, he definitely felt it.

The love, which surpassed borders, words, meanings, that were contained in the lullaby.

Most likely, that was what motherhood was all about.

“Ninna nanna nanna fate; il mio bimbo addormentate  
~ ♪”

In the meantime, the infant once again let out a small sleeping sound from between Sara’s breasts.

The figure of Sara holding that little life form while singing a lullaby.....Be it from Stella’s eyes, or from Ikki’s eyes, it was more beautiful than any appearance or expression until then.

## Part 8

After the infant fell asleep again, Sara left him to Ikki.

Her arms were probably reaching their limit.

“He’s sleeping well.”

Ikki was smiling at the tiny life sleeping peacefully in his arms.

“.....Stella as well.”

“Zzz. Zzz.”

His smile turned bitter.

Stella was also lured by Sara’s lullaby into the dream world.

She had perfect attack, defense, and speed, but it seemed that she was not prepared for abnormal status resistance.

On the other hand, after passing the infant to Ikki, Sara opened up her notebook on her knees, and started sketching the infant that was sleeping in Ikki’s



arms.

It was not like the godspeed drawing she used during her battles, rather it was done slowly and carefully.

On the neat white notebook.

With a single pencil, she was shaping a world with depth.

It was at the level where if one stretched out his hand towards it, it felt as if his finger would sink into the notebook and touch the infant's soft cheek.

To Ikki who had no knowledge about painting, Sara's technique seemed to be just like magic.

".....Hmm? What?"

She probably noticed Ikki's gaze peeping at her notebook.

Sara faced Ikki's gaze, and tilted her head as if asking 'what is it?'.

"Ah, sorry. Just that, I thought you are good at this."

Well, she was a world famous painter whose paintings were worth an astronomical figure of fourteen billion

USD per piece, according to Stella.

It was obvious that she would be good at it, but he still could not help himself from voicing out his opinion.

Although Ikki had no knowledge about painting, he possessed excellent perceptive eyes that could precisely observe a person's movement.

Therefore, he understood.

Even with just one casual stroke, from her arm, fingers, and the pencil movements, he could tell that it was the result of an out-of-norm training, making that single stroke of hers one-of-a-kind.

It was the same as a genius swordsman's way of sword.

It was a territory that couldn't be reached without extraordinary love and passion, and the resolve to follow the path to the end no matter what.

“.....You really love painting.”

Honestly speaking, to Ikki, Sara was a troublesome person who was after him to be her nude model, to the point that he didn't even want to be near her, but

he sincerely respected that strong will of hers.

However, to those words from Ikki, Sara...

“.....Currently, I like it.”

Replied with a meaningful response.

“Currently?”

Ikki showed his doubt at that meaningful response, and Sara peeked at Ikki’s eyes for a moment.....

And then.....muttered bit by bit.

With a voice filled with hatred—

“In the past, I hated painting the most.”

## **Part 9**

Sara Bloodlily.

The girl who was called that was living on the bed of a small Atelier during her childhood.....in the mountains of the outskirts of Italy.

She was born with an illness that had weakened her bones, making her unable to even walk on her own.

Therefore, the scenery that could be seen from the bed of that Atelier was her world.

It was her father.

Her father was not a famous artist, and he just continued to draw on a huge canvas.

It was a religious painting of a Messiah burning down many devils with his holy light, saving the world from Armageddon.

He had been drawing that, throughout the years, regardless of any year—

Only the profile of his back had remained in Sara's

memory.

She did not even have a single memory of him turning around.

Even if she called out to him, she did not receive any response.

Hence, she did not know her father's face.

She didn't even know if she had ever seen it before.

He had always, always, as if he was being possessed by the devil, been indulged in the painting before his eyes.

Therefore —

“.....I hated it. The existence of painting that took my father away from me.”

She wanted his attention.

She wanted his love.

Sara let out her feelings of the time when she was young.

Ikki asked her.

“Then, why did Sara-san.....start painting herself?”

Even though she hated painting so much.

Sara answered Ikki’s question.

The trigger was.....her father’s death.

On a certain day, her father fell onto the canvas and died.

According to the housekeeper who had brought her father to the hospital, the cause seemed to have been the worsening of his chronic disease.

What remained in the Atelier were just the lonely Sara and a huge incomplete oil painting.

After crying for about three days, when her tears dried up, Sara.....stared at the painting which had killed her father with eyes burning with hatred.

That huge canvas which could just about fill the area of an entire wall in the room.

In the end, the center where the Messiah was supposed to be drawn was left blank, incomplete after her father’s death.

And then, she made up her mind to destroy it.

It was obvious. She only felt hatred towards that painting.

Because of it, her father had never once turned around.

Sara exhausted all of her strength to inch closer from her bed to the front of the canvas after a whole day, and stood before it by leaning on a chair.

Then she grabbed a painting knife lying nearby and held it up.

In order to rip apart the painting with the knife.

However.....

“I was not able to swing the knife down.....”

What was the reason for that?

It was because in a place away from her bed, she noticed something she wasn't able to notice from her bed.

That was.....a number of empty paint tubes that she

could not even begin to count, littered on the floor.

The remains of tens of paint brushes with their bristles disheveled.

The palette with multiple layers of hardened paint, and then, the tattered blank on the canvas that was left behind after being painted and scraped off countless times.

.....Its existence emitted heat that felt like the obsession of her father's passion.

The moment she felt that, the hatred in Sara's heart.....was overcome by sadness.

The tears she thought had dried up flowed out uncontrollably again.

He had spent a great amount of time, even disregarding his own daughter, shaving away his own health, and painstakingly drew it, but in the end, he couldn't complete it.

Her father was unable to complete it.

Even after putting in that much thought and passion, her father did not receive the favor of the Goddess of



Beauty, Muse.

How much regret would that cause her?

Thinking about her father's regret, she stopped crying.

She knew just how much effort he had put into that drawing from how much hatred she felt.

.....Therefore, Sara resolved herself as her tears flowed.

She would complete the painting that her father was unable to complete before he died.

“Because I think that rather than shedding tears of sadness, or holding flower of mourning, doing this, only this, is an act of filiality towards my deceased father.”

It was the only single bond that remained between her and her father.

—After that, her father's acquaintance, Kouzou Kazamatsuri, came to Sara saying that 「I was told that if anything were to happen to him, please take care of his daughter」 when her father was alive, took her in, and loaned a large sum of money to let a doctor in

Rebellion, Grand Professor, who was one of the executives called Numbers, treat her illness.

Then, Sara had obtained a body that could move freely to some extent despite not being completely cured. She practised her painting skill in order to fulfil her father's regret, while looking for a model for the sake of filling up that blank, the brave Messiah who stood before all of the malice sprouting out.

A single girl, wandering around the world, meeting dangers that threatened her life many times, even so, she did not compromise.

She had spent ten years, more than half of her life.

If her technique or the model were half-baked, the passion, that could be called a grudge, contained in that painting would've consumed her completely.

"As I was doing that.....before I knew it, I started to like painting.....When I realized that his blood was flowing in me after all, I was slightly happy."

".....I see."

From Sara's confession, Ikki was convinced of one thing.

The abnormal obstinance she had towards him. It was the reason for that.

So that was why, even though Ikki's senses could not understand which part of him made her go to such extent, but if he was the model she had found after spending half of her life searching for it, it would not be easy to make her give up.....However...

“.....Why?”

“What?”

“Why are you doing that much? You don't even know your father's face, right?”

Ikki was convinced of the reason for Sara's obstinacy, but on the other hand, he could not understand it.

Why would she go to such an extent for her father, who had never once cared for her?

That was.....probably a question that overlapped with his own situation.

However, to Ikki's question, Sara answered naturally without a shred of hesitation.

“Because I love him.”

“Even though you can’t remember his face? Even though you had never received his love?”

“It’s true that I cannot remember my father’s face. I don’t have any memory of him turning his head back. I know that he isn’t a praiseworthy father. But.....I have never once hated my father. In that case, that’s fine. It is fine with just that.

If that feeling comes from within my heart — It doesn’t matter if my love is one-sided.”

Sara said.

It could be that her father was seriously neglecting her.

No, even if that was not the case, her father probably would not want his daughter to add anything onto his legacy.

However, she did not care about that.

Because they were father and daughter.

“My selfishness for loving him on my own, allowing me

that much should be obvious, right?”

“——”

At that moment, Ikki found the answer to one of his own question.

That answer could also be used in the relationship between him and his father—

(——.....I...see.)

Ikki had been.....thinking that he had no other choice but to cut his ties with his father.

Their paths would never intersect no matter how far they walked.

That was.....the only conclusion in the end.

(But—that’s not true.)

No matter if his father wished to cut their ties.

No matter how much his father thought of alienating him.

Those were not problems he should be considering himself with.

Of course.

The other party was never once concerned about him.

Then, why must he be considerate of the other party?

(That's right.....This is not someone else's, but my own feelings!)

It had nothing to do with what Itsuki thought.

If he did not hate his father himself—there was no need to unreasonably hate him.

That sounded fine. Just be on their own separate paths.

Be it him or his father, they were just a person with one heart.

Desperately travelling on their own lives, even if their paths wouldn't meet as a result.....

—It wouldn't change the fact that they were blood-related father and son.

(I will be willful. This is my special privilege.)

That was Ikki Kurogane's answer to all the problems revolving around the Kurogane household.

The moment Ikki arrived at that answer, his heart, which had always.....felt like it had a lead weighing down on it since his childhood, felt refreshed as the weight was lifted.

Finally, the honest feeling of wanting to be father and son with Itsuki, even if it was twisted.....he had confirmed it.

He was so happy that he unconsciously smiled.

Taking a glance at Ikki's expression, Sara muttered in relief.

"That's a good face. If my model has a depressed face, I will be troubled."

Ikki did not notice those words.

Earlier in the morning, Sara had wanted to say something from seeing his appearance from meeting with Itsuki.

At that time, Sara probably saw the relationship between Ikki and Itsuki reflecting her and her father's.

Like what Ikki had done just then.

And, that was why she asked him 'Is that so?'.

It was because she knew.

That kind of complicated matter.

And then.....she had just conveyed that.

Not for others, it was for her own sake.

“.....I have settled one of my concerns due to Sara-san. Thank you.”

“If you want to show your gratitude, become my model.”

Ikki smiled bitterly at Sara's reply.

However, since he found out about her background, he could also understand the reason for her obstinance.

Putting it simply, all her motivation was concentrated onto that single point.

And then.....if she had that kind of reason—



“I got it. It’s fine.”

“Eh?”

Ikki’s response caused Sara to open her eyes wide.

She probably did not expect him to respond positively.

However, Ikki obviously would not accept it without any condition.

“However, I have one condition. You have to defeat me in the upcoming match.”

“.....Match.”

“Yeah. The upcoming third match, If Sara-san can win, then I will be a model like you want. But if you lose, then you have to completely give up on making me your model.....How about it?”

It was at the same instance Ikki finished his words.

Ikki felt all of the hairs on his body stand up and his whole body was shaking.

Before his eyes was.....the figure of Sara, who was clearly different from how she acted until then, with a

changed look in her eyes.

“——.....I understand.”

In the depth of her eyes, a strong will that was blazing could be seen.

The pressure emitted from her seemed to be burning his bangs.

Ikki held his breath at that feeling.

—She was on a different level.

In the first place, Seven Star Sword-Art Festival was a ceremony of knights.

It was a battle for glory to people living in the way of warrior like Ikki and Stella, but Sara was different.

He understood it after hearing her story.

She had a rare talent, a high combat power, but she did not have anything to bet during that event.

In addition, she was definitely not passionate about the activities of Rebellion.

What she wished for was at most completing the

legacy of her father.

Everything was just a process for the sake of that goal.

Hence, her motivation was low.

She also showed a glimpse of it in her battle against Kuraudo.

That was—

(Isn't it a waste?)

The passion Sara had towards arts was the same as what they as knights had for battles.

Their direction was different, but that heat and strength of will were—the same. No, perhaps even greater?

He could not understand.

That was why—he wanted to affirm it.

Hence, Ikki added one matter into the next fight.

The direction of her will.....he wanted to redirect the maximum of that into the next battle.

With that promise, Sara would probably be serious.

She would probably come at Ikki with all her strength.

However, that was fine.

He would face that with his own passion, sharpening it.

Because that was what the Seven Star Sword-Art Festival was all about.

## **Part 10**

After that, the mother of the infant rushed over from the adjacent department store, and they returned the lost infant to his guardian safely.

Then the three of them ate a light meal, left the department store, and returned to the event venue.

The time was 4:30pm.

Two hours had already been shaved away before the moment of their decisive battle.



**Chapter 10 - Seven Stars Sword-  
Art Festival third round -  
Begins**

# 破軍学園壁新聞

キャラクターピックアップ

文責・日下部加々美

BYAKUYA JOGASAKI

## 城ヶ崎白夜

### ■PROFILE

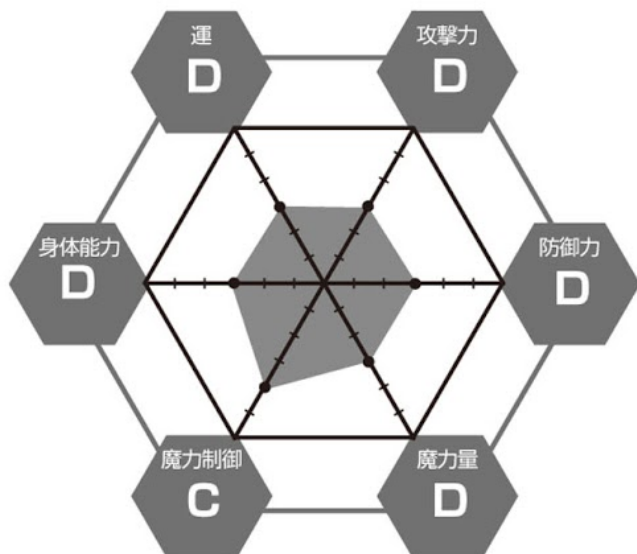
所属：武曲学園三年

伐刀者ランク：C

伐刀絶技：白い手<sup>ゴッドハンド</sup>

二つ名：天眼<sup>てんがん</sup>

人物概要：昨年度七星剣武祭準優勝者



### かがみんチェック！



個々のステータス自体はそこまで高くないけどロックオンした物体の座標を自在に移動させる瞬間移動能力<sup>テレポート</sup>《白い手》<sup>ゴッドハンド</sup>が、場外テンカウント負けのある七星剣武祭では鬼のように強力なんだよね。

＊いしのなかにいる＊

をされたら殆どの選手はどうすることも出来ないもん。

先輩が初手<sup>いっとうしゅ</sup>《一刀羅刹》を選んだのは正しかったと私は思うよ。



## HAGUN ACADEMY WALL NEWSPAPER

Character Topics \_\_\_\_ Writer • Kagami Kusakabe

### Byakuya Jougasaki

#### ■ PROFILE

Affiliation: Bukyoku Academy, Year Three

Blazer Rank: C

Noble Art: God Hand

Nickname: Eye of Heaven

Personal Summary: Last year's Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival second place

Attribute chart (starting at far left, going clockwise)

Physical Ability: D

Luck: D

Offensive Power: D

Defensive Power: D

Magic Capacity: D

Magic Control: C

### Kagamin Check!

*His personal attributes aren't high, but since the Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival has a ten-count ring out rule, his teleportation ability "God Hand", which can freely move objects that he locks onto, gives*

*him power on the level of an ogre. If he teleports an opponent*

**INTO ROCK**, *then few if any of the contenders would be able to a  
thing. Senpai was right to use Ittou Rasetsu from the start, I'd say.*

## Part 1

「The time is now 6pm, brought to you by Nippon Telegraph Public Corporation.」

*\*Pi. Pi. Pi.\** A special alarm that rang once at every three seconds.

At the same time that alarm sounded from all the speakers in the dome, the night lights were switched on.

After the long daytime of the summer had passed, they lit up the dome which had begun to be covered in a thin veil of darkness.

And then...

「Everyone, thank you for waiting! I hereby announce that the third round of the Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival is about to begin!」

The live broadcast of the cue for the start of the third round had been given.

The audience sitting at their seats raised an earth-

trembling cheer.

「The best eight of this event will be pitted against each other in the third round's battle.

The expectations for the fierce upcoming battles has already made the event venue's excitement reach the boiling point!

Continuing with the live broadcast, I am Iida! Yaotome-pro will be the commentator!

Then without further ado, let's welcome the first pair of the third round's battle!

First, from the blue gate enters Contender Kaga Renji!」

In response to that call, a big shadow appeared from the darkness in the blue gate.

The figure that appeared on the dazzling stage, brightly lit by the spotlights, was that of a huge rock-like man whose height surpassed two meters. That was exactly —

「Oo! I'm Kaga! Kaga has arrived!」

「As always, he's so biiig! 」

He was the hero of Hokkaido, Kaga Renji.

「Coming from the land in the North, from Rokuson Academy, the Panzer Grizzly!

What's more eye-catching than anything is his huge body that doesn't put shame to the name of a Grizzly!

236 centimeters in height! 370 kilograms in weight!

He uses his Herculean strength with a body no different than that of a brown bear as a weapon to fight, one of the best super power fighters in Japan.

The prominent Contenders have been eliminated one after another in a wave of turbulence, now there is only one left from last year's best eight who has managed to advance into the third round!

Will he be able to show the spirit of the seniors before the new Contenders, who are riding on this wave!？」

「Contender Kaga is a balanced player with a very high level of offense and defense. His excellent physique allows him to exert bulldozer-level arm strength. And his Blazer ability, Steel Skin, is an original one. He is simply strong, simply hard. As such, regardless of how

he uses it, the situation or the compatibility with his opponent's ability, it will not influence his pure strength. In this event with many unique ability users, such Contenders may be the ones who can display their true value.」

Then, Kaga stepped onto the ring for the third round battle after receiving the cheers from the audience.

—In that instant, he took an action that he had never taken before.

He grabbed his own clothes with his huge hand, and then threw them off after tearing them apart.

「Wooo—aah!? Contender Kaga! He threw off his special size uniform after tearing it apart, leaving him with only one piece of loincloth! What kind of performance is this!?!」

The announcer and the audience were confused.

In regards to that, commentator Yaotome cut in.

「Just like 「Ring」, 「Bracelet」and 「Glasses」, a Blazer's Device does not necessarily need to take on the form of a weapon. And Contender Kaga's Device *Raiden* is that loincloth — Mawashi.<sup>[6]</sup> It's usually worn

underneath his clothes so it could not be seen, but.....he stood onto the stage that made him throw away his clothes, and fight with only his mawashi. He probably considers the outcome of this match to be very important, so he's displayed his fighting spirit like that.」

Yaotome's explanation was spot on.

He challenged that important match with only his Device.

That was Kaga's style of gathering his fighting spirit from praying for his victory.

Then, after undressing, Kaga bent his knees and dropped his waist on the spot.

After that, he raised his left leg up straight facing towards the sky, and slammed it down onto the ring.

Accompanied by a tremor immediately after, the left side of the ring sank into the ground.

Every person in the dome opened their eyes wide in shock.

「A-Amaziiiing! The moment Contender Kaga stepped

down from shiko<sup>[7]</sup>, the 100m diameter ring slanted and sank into the grouuuund!!!! And then he raised his right leg on the opposite side straight up —— dosukooooi!<sup>[8]</sup>」

The tremor shook the ring again and the right side also sank into the ground just like the left.

「The slanted ring returned to horizontal level after the second step, but it has clearly sunk into the ground as a whole after being stepped by his shiko, for about 10cm into the ground! What power!」

「That's also quite impressive, but take a look at his feet.」

「Feet, is it? Wha, th-this is!」

As Yaotome pointed out, they looked towards Kaga's feet.

At there was—

「Footprints! On the ring made with special stone material that can withstand a direct impact from napalm missile for Blazer use, as if he had stepped on a muddy beach, a pair of clear footprints with even his toe shape has been carved into it!」



「Even though the shape of his feet has been carved into the ring, there are no cracks around it.....It is the evidence that his power has been concentrated without dispersing. Contender Kaga is not just about power, he also possesses the detailed control on the flow of his power. As expected.」

「Uoooo! As expected, incredible! Not just for being big!」

「Kyaa! Kuma-chan so cool~~~~!」

Cheers rose from the audience seats at Kaga's performance.

Kaga used his tough body as a weapon, taking the unique battle technique of the sumo style; along with a personality not losing out to his well-built body, he had gathered a passionate fan base from all over the country.

There were also many fans chasing after him to that venue.

Kaga would usually return a smile back at them, but he was different at that moment.

“\_\_\_\_\_”

He did not respond back to them. Instead, Panzer Grizzly looked towards the gate where his opponent would appear from with a serious expression.

「Contender Kaga's performance imbued with his fighting spirit has stirred up the venue!」

However, Contender Kaga's eyes are as calm as still water, focusing on a single spot!

That's right, they are focused on the red gate where his opponent will show up from!

Then, let's not waste time and introduce the other man of valor who will be fighting in this decisive battle in A-Block!」

In accordance to the announcer's words, the spotlights focused onto the red gate.

In the midst of the light, a swordsman clad in black kimono walked out.

「Prestigious Kurogane household's eldest son, the genius who made an impact in the whole country as the Kirin Child in his childhood.

The moment he shone as the world champion in the U-12 (Elementary level) International Tournament, anybody would have thought so!

Great Hero, Ryoma Kurogane's rightful successor has been born right there!

However! As the surrounding is still indulged in excitement, the genius has gotten sick of it!

He is hopelessly sick of the League's rule of not allowing real blades in battles!

He has been seeking!

A real battle! A fight with life on the line!

Aiming for a higher goal!

As such, he disappeared from our sights!

Every person grieved over this loss!

But! That genius has returned to Japan!

In his last year of high school, he steps onto the ring of this Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival!

Possessing overwhelming strength to the point of blurring that figure of his within our memories!

Newcomer Akatsuki Academy third year! Contender Sword Emperor of Wind, Ouma Kurogane!」

With his long hair and hem of the kimono swaying, step by step, Ouma shortened the distance between him and Kaga.

The audiences at their seats swallowed their breaths at his appearance.

「.....I-Incredible.....」

「He hasn't changed.....what pressure.....!」

Even though he was just walking, they felt like his sword pressure was splitting their skin from just a touch.

That pressure felt just like an unsheathed katana.

「Yaotome-pro. The last time Contender Sword Emperor of Wind, Ouma Kurogane appeared in official battle was already five years ago, how about it? Contender Ouma seen from a pro's point of view, that is.」

「He is strong.」

「.....I-Is that all?」

「Honestly speaking, I cannot give any further explanation at this point of time.」

「Is that so?」

Yaotome nodded.

「Since in all of the matches until now, he has never once gotten serious.」

Be it the first or second round battles, Ouma won in the same manner.

Against the opponents who challenged him with long distance magic battle, because they knew they were at a disadvantage against the Wind Emperor in sword clashing, he just walked straight towards them and cut them down.

It was just that.

Ouma did not evade nor defend against his opponent's long distance shooting.

He really just walked straight.

His body just taking on the attacks from his opponent.

Even so, he did not receive a single injury, neither did he stop in his tracks.

It was so one-sided that it could not even be called a match.

There was not a shred of technique. Nor was there any leeway to intervene.

The only thing left was the difference in the level of their performances.

Hence it was understood that he was strong.

However, there was no concrete understanding beyond that.

If it could not be understood, then it could not be explained, was what Yaotome was trying to say.

「.....However, the opponent of Wind Emperor in the third round is Panzer Grizzly, someone who had fought him many times when they were young. He was not the type to play trickeries, not to mention from seeing the performance just now, his extraordinary offensive power could be said to be a threat even to the A-Rank

knight Wind Emperor.....I believe that we will be able to see the true growth of Contender Ouma from the five years gap.」

「I see! That's something to look forward to! Oops, and now, the two Contenders have stepped onto the starting line.」

The two people faced each other on the ring.

“Ouma. It's been six years since the last time I faced you on the ring. So nostalgic!”

“.....I'm not that close to you to feel nostalgic upon meeting again.”

“Gahaha. You're still such an unsociable guy. Well, fine. Regardless of what you think, I am glad! I have always been praying! To have a serious fight against you with our lives on the line! I have always been waiting for this day to pay you back for the time when we were little! I have been training my body for that purpose!”

Kaga beat his muscular chest as he said so.

When they were still elementary students, Kaga had never once won against that genius of the same age.

However, as Kaga grew up, he had obtained a huge, out of the norm body.

He was already different from back then.

Kaga did not know where and what Ouma had been doing in that five years, but he was confident that he had certainly caught up to Ouma.

Hence, he was not intimidated by the A-Rank knight before him, and declared.

“I’m different from your opponents in the first and second match. I won’t run away from your seriousness! So, face me with your seriousness! Ouma!!!!”

To that, Ouma replied with a cold look.

“That depends on you. Renji.”

“Gahaha! That’s true! Then, I will make you serious immediately!”

「The warriors facing each other on the ring are exchanging their friendship. Contender Panzer Grizzly, Renji Kaga has just declared that he won’t run away from the frontal confrontation against the A-Rank



knight, Wind Emperor! That would only be recklessness for ordinary Blazers. But Contender Kaga has the actual power to achieve it! Just like Yaotome-pro said, we may be able to witness Contender Ouma's real strength in this match!

Now. The referee is about to give signal the start of the match—

—Begin!」

## Part 2

The instant the referee announced the start of the match, Kaga was the first to move.

“OOOOOOOOoOoOooOoOoOOoOoooo!!!!!!”

He roared with a voice that resonated in the whole dome, and boiled up the magic power in his whole body.

At the same time, his body began to change.

Losing the organic skin color, it changed into shiny steel.

That was the reason for the Panzer Grizzly nickname.

Renji Kaga’s Noble Art that changed his whole body into steel — Steel Skin.

「Contender Kaga made the first move! He literally changed his whole body into steel!」

「It is a process necessary to utilize his ability. That’s only obvious.」

Just like Yaotome said, Kaga had to go through that process for his battle or he wouldn't be able to begin.

His huge brown bear size body, and the arm strength enhanced by his weight increased several times.

And then the hardness that could repel his opponent's attacks with his guard.

With the strength of those two parts, the attack-specialized battle style utilizing sumo's rush power and superior handling technique, he would overwhelm his opponent. That was the battle style of Panzer Grizzly.

However—

“Gahaha! That's wrong! Commentator-san!”

That's right, that was only up to that moment.

「Eh.....?」

“This is different from the Steel Skin until now. This is my secret trump card for fighting against Ouma!”

As he said so, at the same time Kaga completed transforming his whole body into steel, a different magic power from Steel Skin ran across his whole

body. Immediately after—

“GAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!!”

Along with his roar, Renji Kaga’s body began to change in a way never seen before.

On the steeled lump that was Kaga’s shoulders, two new arms on each side, in total four arms grew out from both sides.

「W-What! T-This is! His arms have multiplieeeeed!?!」

The announcer and audience raised surprised shouts at the strange transformation.

On the other hand, Yaotome in charge of commentary analyzed the situation calmly.

「I see. Not just hardening, that’s also shape-shifting. With this increase in number of arms, it’s obvious that the offensive and defensive power will increase threefold.....! He must have thought this through.」

“Gahaha! Just as commentator-san said! My Device *Raiden’s* ability is steelifying of my body! Thus it is reasonable for me to be able to change the form of said steel freely! This is what I was hiding! Its name is

— Steel Asura Form! Ouma! I have spent five years developing this technique to win against you! Receive it gratefully!!”

After completing his transformation, Kaga sank his huge body down and took a squatting stance.

Then, using the recoil from knocking his tight fist onto the ground to lift his upper half torso, with the leg power that sank the enormous ring into the earth, he propelled his huge body forward.

That figure was just like a cannonball.

「F-Fast! Contender Kaga! He is rushing towards Contender Ouma with a speed one wouldn't imagine possible with his huge body! How will Contender Ouma handle it!?!」

However, Ouma's response to Kaga's assault was the same as in the first and second round.

“.....”

「——Whaaat!? T-This is!? Contender Ouma! He is neither defending nor dodging! He is walking straight towards Contender Kaga's assault! He doesn't seem to be afraid of that arm strength and huge body!」

「That's some big confidence.....However, that's being reckless.」

As Yaotome said, Ouma's response was a foolish decision in anyone's eyes.

He was different from the opponent in the first and second match. Kaga's offensive power was at a level that even using Crimson Princess, Stella Vermillion's overwhelming magic power would not be able to stop. A direct hit would not end well.

Even so, he did not take up any defense.

—Kaga felt a strong fury towards Ouma's response.

He was belittling him to the point of not even trying to evade. To that extent.

However, that probably could not be helped.

He had never once won against Ouma.

Being looked down upon was obvious.

In that case—

(With this one strike, I will wake you up!)

“UOOoOoOoOOooOOryaaAAA!!!!”

In an instant, Kaga’s opened palm hit Ouma’s face with all of his arm strength and body weight.

At the moment of the impact, the atmosphere shook as if a large truck crashed in a frontal collision

It was undoubtedly a direct hit.

Ouma really did not use any defense or evasion against Kaga’s attack.

However — He would obviously not come out unscathed after doing that.

Ouma’s body greatly inclined and sank down.

And then, Kaga decided he would not let go of the decisive opening created by that overconfidence!

In that moment, Kaga saw his chance for victory.

Panzer Grizzly executed the prided secret move combining attack and defense in one.

Using hundreds of open palm strikes, while warding off the opponent’s attacks, at the same time, showering

him with super heavy continuous strikes,

That was a new sure-kill technique executed against Ouma with his six arms—— the Hundred Lotus Palm.

“Asura Hundred Lotus Palm —— ooOoOOOOO!!!!”

「Contender Kaga is dealing a decisive blow to Contender Ouma who has broken his posture! Rush Rush Rush! He is using his steel palm to strike continuously at his opponent with speed that our eyes can't even catch up wiiiith!」

Receiving that earlier strike squarely, Ouma would not be able to evade the rush.

He was completely caught in that storm with the steel palms raining on him.

Kaga trembled from the response that his sure-kill technique had hit in the best way possible.

He could do it.

Ouma's body was about to collapse on the ring.

He could win if he just continued attacking like that!



The premonition of victory that he continued to seek in the past five years let his strength explode beyond his limit.

However—

(—.....!?)

Kaga's excited expectation was gradually thinning away.

Anxiety welled up to replace that.

Why?

Even though he was attacking so one-sidedly.

Even though all of Kaga's steel palm strikes had a clean hit on his target.

Why did he feel anxious?

The reason was exactly because of what was happening.

Kaga's attacks had all hit their target with clear feedbacks.

In spite of that—

(Why won't he fall!?)

That question was...

“.....A technique developed to defeat me.....huh.”

Along with the muttering spilled by Ouma, who was taking on his Asura Hundred Lotus Palm, it was resolved.

After Ouma's body had sank at a certain angle, the response coming from Kaga's hand changed.

The image projected in his brain was as if his palm strikes were hitting a rock mountain towering above the skies — a desperate waste of effort.

(He's completely, not budging even a tiny bit.....!)

Ouma did not budge or tremble at all after receiving those steel palm strikes.

That's right, Ouma's posture was not broken by Kaga's palm strikes—

He had lowered his posture in order to swing his sword!

“Those five years were meaningless. Renji.”

“!?!?”

Together with an air-splitting noise, Kaga lost his feeling on the majority of his right half of the body.

Ouma’s diagonal slash from below to above had severed the three right arms executing Asura Hundred Lotus Palm.

Kaga felt a chill at Wind Emperor’s sword arm that treated the hardness of steel as if it was nothing.

However...

“OOoOOOOOOOOoOOAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!!”

Kaga raised a roar to forcefully suppress that chill and continued to attack with his remaining three arms.

He did not retreat.

He was a fighter at his core.

He could only choose to fight.

He did not have a choice of pulling away and attacking.

Hence, he attacked furiously with his life on the line.

However, there was no reason for an opponent who would not be shaken by six arms to be affected by three.

A flash.

The blade that swung up was swung back down, Ouma severed Kaga's left arms.

The swung down blade immediately changed its trajectory and did a horizontal sweep, severing two legs.

“——”

The attack and defense of steel that he continued to train up to that day was totally useless.

Losing his support, Kaga's body collapsed.

His pupils only reflected the despair from their cruel difference in battle strength and a trace of question.

—That much, huh?

The difference in battle strength between him and

Ouma was probably just that huge.

The answer was no.

They had faced each other many times before. Kaga understood.

Ouma Kurogane was not a knight of that level.

He was certainly a talented knight, but that growth was abnormal.

Be it offensive or defensive power, he was obviously.....out of the norm.

It could not be explained with just magic power and magic ability.

There had to be something abnormal involved!

“You.....just what——!?”

However, Kaga’s question could not form into words.

“Gafu!?”

In replacement, fresh blood flowed out from his mouth.

After he lost his support from his two legs, it was when he was about to collapse.

Ouma's off-hand thrust out at Kaga and pierced through his steel chest out through his back.

And then, in the hand that Ouma pierced through to the back, he was holding a beating heart—

“Sto—”

Before the referee could call for a stop, Ouma crushed it without any hesitation.

## Part 3

The moment it was concluded in a way that couldn't be any worse, sorrowful cries came from the audience seats.

「K-KYAAAAaaa!!!!」

「You're kidding, right.....!? Oi!」

「He k-killed him! That bastard!」

「W-What happened!? The moment we thought that the outcome has been decided when both arms and legs were severed! Wind Emperor made follow-up! T-The heart! Contender Kaga's heart was gripped and crushedddd! T-This was a dangerous strike with a great killing intent!」

The referee immediately announced the end of the match due to that situation.

The medic team rushed into the ring.

Amongst them was the figure of Hagun Academy's director, Kurono Shinguuji.

“Clock Lock!”

Kurono leapt over the fence surrounding the audience seats and landed onto the ring just like that.

Then her Device *Ennoia* — a white silver handgun manifested, and she shot towards the fallen Kaga.

The bullet that hit Kaga contained the magic of temporarily stopping the time on his whole body.

That would completely prevent the deterioration of his physical body from oxygen deficiency due to blood loss.

After executing the most appropriate first-aid, Kurono ordered the medic team carrying a stretcher.

“Hurry up with the stretcher! Carry him into the capsule before my technique’s effect run out!”

“Y-Yes!”

A mortal injury.....no, Kaga received an injury that would probably kill him if not for Kurono, was carried out of the ring by others.

On the other hand, Ouma did not even see him off, and was about to leave the ring.



「Contender Ouma, he did not even spare a glance at Contender Kaga who is being carried away! There is not a shred of feeling towards his rival of the same era! His casually leaving back profile is saying that ‘you are not even reflected in my eyes’!」

「Hii.....」

「S-Scary.....」

As the victor was leaving, there was no applause for him.

The duels between mature knights were literally about crossing swords.

Bloodshed was only natural. They might even lose their lives, if they were unlucky.

That’s why the schools would not force students to participate in the Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival.

Those participating were all warriors who had such resolve.

Hence, there was no reason to criticize Ouma.

Although there wasn’t —.....the feeling of whether it

was necessary to go that far could not be dispelled.

The difference in strength between the two was clearly evident.

In that case, would it be going too far to take away the life, something like that.

However, in the frozen atmosphere of the venue from that tragedy...

*\*Clap clap clap.....\**

There was one person clapping hands to congratulate him.

「This applause is.....ah!」

Who exactly was that person?

The announcer followed to the source of the sound and raised a shocked voice.

The person who applauded for Ouma was.....a girl with burning red hair...

「Contender Stella! Only Contender Crimson Princess, Stella Vermillion is applauding for the leaving

Contender Ouma!」

The venue was confused by that fact.

However, Stella did not mind any of that, looked downwards at Ouma, and praised him.

“It was quite a good fight. Ouma.”

A one-sided massacre. To a battle that could only be thought of an overkill, Stella praised it as a good fight.

That was because, different from the audiences, she was able to see much deeper into the match.

That’s right. The audiences misunderstood something from seeing Ouma’s overwhelming victory.

It was Panzer Grizzly’s strength.

“Kaga has proficiently used his Noble Art to increase the number of his arms. Against such an opponent, just cutting away his limbs may not be enough to decide the outcome. One must end his life in order to achieve victory with certainty.”

Of course, with Ouma’s strength, he could avoid a fatal injury and use a method to crush Kaga’s spirits.

If Kaga was like the opponents in the first and second match who employed trickeries, Ouma might have taken such measure.

However, he did not do so.

Stella could understand.

That fight, Ouma.....although he did not show his true power, he faced it seriously.

Because Kaga would not be afraid of him and run away, challenging him straightforwardly, Ouma saw value in that victory.

That man was a knight that would go that far in order to obtain that valuable victory.

.....Putting it negatively, he was a man that would even kill people for victory.

However, even though he was such a man—

“.....However, you did not kill me that time.”

That time was obviously referring to the first time Ouma and Stella faced off each other.

Ouma could have killed Stella if he had felt like it.

The two of them had just that much difference at that time.

“You paid a lot of attention to me. Treating me carefully so that I don’t break.”

Towards her, who was above Kaga in rank, the same A-Rank as him.

Stella did not know what intention he had.

However, there wasn’t any 「seriousness」 in that careful treatment.

Regardless of what intention he had, being treated carefully, in other words, winning against Stella at that time, held no value to Ouma.

—There was no greater humiliation than that.

Therefore, Stella stared at Ouma with her burning pupils and declared.

“I feel sorry for my behavior back then. But.....I won’t do that anymore. Tomorrow, I will make you get serious. I will draw out all of your strength from your core. And then on top of that.....I will kill you.”

She let out a definite killing intent, releasing a pressure that could burn the skin with just a touch.

Although Ouma received it with his whole body...

“What a coincidence. I was also thinking about the same thing.”

Showed a smile revealing his fangs.

## Part 4

After the declaration to Ouma, the venue returned to its clamors with the announcement of Kaga's life being saved.

There were people who were simply relieved. There were people who were excited. There were people who criticized him for going too far.

Despite being amongst those hustling and bustling, Stella looked at the ring that was undergoing cleaning and sighed.

(.....What are you doing, Alice.)

Nagi Arisuin, who should have been back before her, could not be seen in the audience seats.

Shizuku had a match so it couldn't be helped, she believed that Arisuin would come and watch the match, but—

(.....Well, Shizuku's match is more important.)

He probably wanted to stay next to her until the last minute.

As she was thinking about such matter...

“Kukuku! As expected of the woman who’s called 「The Queen who subdued a flame dragon」! There isn’t a second person who could say such caustic words to that man as his opponent.”

A young high-pitched voice filled with arrogance came from behind her.

Stella remembered the owner of that voice.

“.....I don’t remember being called by that nickname.”

As she turned back, it was exactly the person she had expected.

A girl wearing a pink dress and an eye patch.

A member of the Akatsuki Academy Stella had eliminated in the first round battle.

It was the Beast Tamer, Rinna Kazamatsuri.

Waiting behind her was, as expected, or rather as usual, the maid with a cold expression, Charlotte Cordé.



“Fuu, I have just arrived! You may rejoice!”

“What do you want? Even if we are acquainted, I don’t think we are close enough to be speaking like this though? Kazamatsuri.”

Stella’s response towards Rinna’s intimate conversation was refusal.

Well, it was be obvious considering their relationship, but—

“Kuku. Hear that, my servant. This woman has beaten us to a pulp, chopped us up, then roasted us whole in the end, and yet she still wants to beat us up more?”

“Yes, I have heard that, my lady. The country with such a violent imperial princess will soon be in ruins.”

“Gu.....”

Just as those two said, it was a fact that she had beaten them to a pulp, so Stella felt guilty when she mentioned it.

“It’s not like I haven’t beaten you enough! I’m asking what do you want!”

“Of course it’s to watch the next match. Since Bloody

Da Vinci, the one who has formed a contract of blood and soul with me is in the next match!”

“Contract of soul?”

“What my lady said is that because Sara-sama became old master.....Kouzou Kazamatsuri-sama’s adopted child, my lady, who is danna-sama’s daughter, became a step-sister to her.”



“That’s how it is!”

“Your words are meaningless and incomprehensible as always.....”

“You don’t think about it. You feel it. Do that and you will understand.”

“I don’t really want to understand it.....Well, basically, you came to watch the fight, huh.”

“Umu. But watching it alone is boring, and I coincidentally saw the Crimson Princess, so I came to talk with you. You can feel honored.”

“You’re extremely annoying.”

.....Something like that, but before that...

“Alone you say, isn’t the maid with you?”

“M-Me and Charl are one in heart and body, so it doesn’t count.”

“Aah.....my lady, it’s a waste to say such words to a useless bitch like me.....”

Charlotte’s cheeks were dyed red at Rinna’s words.

However, on the other hand, Rinna's expression twitched.

Rinna got near to Stella's ear and whispered the reason.

".....To tell you the truth. Ever since losing to you, Charl has felt responsible for failing to protect me.....When the two of us are alone, she holds things that can only be seen as torture tools and asks me to punish the useless her, so I'm troubled over it. So please stay with me!"

"Y-You also have it hard....."

"Umu.....I said that I don't mind it though. Being too loyal is also troubling....."

(No, I think this is not about being too loyal.)

Stella could only smile bitterly as she had seen a similar case before.

Meanwhile, as she was whispering with Rinna like that...

*\*Garigarigarigarigari.....\**

She heard a sound of teeth-grinding.

As she looked towards the source of that sound, she saw Charlotte with bloodshot eyes staring at her while biting her fingernails.

“Getting so close to my lady.....at a distance where they can feel each other’s breaths.....if she doesn’t go into a bath later.....that woman’s smell will stain my lady.....!”

(Scary!)

Stella immediately took distance from Rinna.

She should not get involved with such kind of people.

However.....well, if it was just watching the match together, it would probably be fine.

“It’s not like I have a reservation here. My friends are also not here.”

“Umu! A festival has to be lively!”

Getting Stella’s approval, Rinna’s voice bounced with happiness.

Then she took her seat next to her, and received some

popcorn and cola from Charlotte.

(.....I wonder where she took those out from.)

“But I was surprised during the second round. To think that he would use the once-a-day trump card on the first opponent —”

Ignoring Stella’s curiosity, Rinna threw popcorns into her mouth and chatted with Stella.

The topic was of course about the next match.

It was about the opening surprise attack Ikki had used in the second round.

“Ikki probably thought that Byakuya was just that strong of an opponent. That ability is definitely troublesome if they actually faced each other.”

“But my 「Sister on paper」 is also the same, right?”

“Isn’t that way of saying too much!?”

Stella retorted without thinking, but Rinna continued, not minding it.

“It’s true that Eye of Heaven is a troublesome power. However, speaking of troublesome, wouldn’t Bloody

Da Vinci be more troublesome after all? Since she can use Purple Caricature to recreate Blazers' Noble Arts. If she wanted, she could possibly use Eye of Heaven's power, and even if can't, she can use Ittou Shura like in her second round. Losing his trump card against that kind of opponent, isn't it disadvantageous no matter how you think about it? Another One's advancement would end here, wouldn't it?"

Rinna spoke about her concerns to Stella in a way that purposely fanned up her anxiety.

Paying her back.....she did not go that far, but probably a little bit of teasing.

However, Stella's expression did not falter at all.

Instead...

"If you are talking about advantage and disadvantage, the fact that Ikki is F-Rank is already a disadvantage against any opponent.....But Ikki didn't lose. He didn't give up. That's why he is in this place now. In this quarter final that will decide the best four at the knights' summit nationwide in Japan. Hence, he will win. Even today, for sure."

In Stella's eyes that looked at the ring, there was trust



to the point of having surplus to spare.

However, that was only obvious.

Because Worst One had always overcome that level of pinch.

(Not to mention, it seems that he has settled a major trouble of his.....Fufu.)

Before arriving there, she saw Ikki's refreshed expression as if he had taken a load off his chest. Stella smiled.

And then, she replied to Rinna.

"Akatsuki Academy is the side that should resolve itself. The Ikki now is.....definitely impossibly strong."

## Part 5

At the same time when Stella and Rinna were having such a conversation.

In order to prepare for the upcoming match, Ikki Kurogane was in the waiting room—

Not there, he was standing in the hallway connected to the VIP audience seats.

And then, he raised his head when the person he was waiting for arrived, and spoke up.

“Father. I have been waiting for you.”

Itsuki Kurogane’s beast-like sharp gaze responded to the voice and he replied briefly.

“.....What are you doing here? Isn’t it about time for the match?”

“I was waiting for you. It’s about the matter we talked about earlier today. I want to give you my response.”

The matter in the day was, of course, the suggestion about cutting ties with Itsuki.

Regarding that, Ikki stated his final answer.

“About that, I refuse.”

“.....!”

Itsuki opened his eyes wide, somewhat surprised by Ikki's answer.

The cutting of ties was tantamount to exiling Ikki, who could not be handled by the Kurogane, so that they could save face.

Although it would've been terrible, there was still merit for Ikki as well.

Cutting their ties would mean that there would be no more interferences from the Kurogane household.

Hence, Itsuki probably did not think that Ikki would refuse.

However, Ikki's answer was a no.

“I did not live according to Father's will. Instead, I have just caused trouble for you. That will not change from now on. There won't be any changes. Because I can only take this path.....Therefore, cutting our ties

would have worked out. That way it would've been better. That's right, I also thought that way. However.....even so, I am Ikki Kurogane."

It was not anyone's, but his own wish to do so.

"That's why I won't cut our ties. At least I won't consent to it."

Why couldn't he hate such a father?

That reason, honestly speaking, Ikki could not understand it either.

It's just that, even after that, he understood that he would be sad if he were to completely lose the bond he had with his father.

In that case, there was no reason for him to suppress himself and follow the opinion of the Kurogane household.

That was Ikki's final answer.

Receiving it, Itsuki...

"Is that really fine?"

Showed an obviously confused expression.

It was a rare expression for Itsuki, who usually didn't let his face reveal his emotions.

However, Ikki's answer did not change.

Since he decided to be willful, he would not withdraw himself.

“Well.....From Father's perspective, such a rebellious and prodigal son would only be in your way.”

However—

“It's not about me. Are you really fine with it?”

“.....Eh?”

Being asked such an unexpected question, Ikki's thoughts froze for a moment.

—'You'...

Certainly, his father said that just then.

That Itsuki.....asked about Ikki's opinion.

Why? Ikki lost his words due to the confusion.

Itsuki continued to speak.

“I am the head of the Kurogane household. That, in other words, is the discipline of the knights in this country. It was decided from the moment of my birth. I have been educated for this sake, and so I have been walking down this path.”

Regardless of who, towards anyone — strictness.

The responsibility passed down by generations of Kurogane household was carved in his name.

“Therefore I don’t know anything beyond this. I’m a man who cannot choose to live in any other way than this. You have disobeyed the Kurogane’s discipline. Supporting you for pushing yourself forward on a thorny path you chose yourself, congratulating you for climbing up despite spilling blood on that thorny path and reaching the height of being the best eight in the whole country.....I can’t do any of it. And it won’t change from now on either.

I am such a man. Are you fine with calling such a man your father?”

“ .....

In that instant, Ikki imagined the life of his father, Itsuki Kurogane, as a person.

Itsuki, as the son of Ikki's grandfather, Genma Kurogane, was born.

Although Genma was the son of the Great Hero, Ryoma Kurogane, he felt contempt towards Ryoma, who held different opinion and behavior from the traditional ways of the Kurogane household, so he had formed an alliance with the elders who held the same opinion as him. He was someone who had half exiled his father, Ryoma, from the Kurogane household, and snatched the position of the head of Kurogane household, a person known as the rightmost wing of the moderate faction.

Born under such a man.....Itsuki had no brothers.

Hence, Genma and the elders pushed all of their ideals onto the next head of the family, which was him.

Before he could think for himself, and while his ego was just budding, he received such a thorough education.

The soft.....mentality of a child that could be hurt even with a gentle touch, was toppled by them, who had even carved their ideals into the name of the child.

The result born from that — Iron Blood.

Showing no compromise, no mercy, the 「Discipline」 of living only for the sake of the country.

Ikki's father, Itsuki Kurogane was such a man.

Hence, he would talk about cutting their ties when he could no longer handle his own son.

.....He thought that way.

However...

(That's, I was mistaken.....)

It was a strange thing, if he thought about it a little.

If he wanted to cut their ties for such a reason, then there would not be a need to be bothered with Ikki's opinion.

There was only one reason to hear his opinion.



Ikki comprehended.

That was.....the mission and ideal he had imposed on himself. The responsibility towards the country, the obligation towards the Blazers belonging to the country. The man who was burdened with all kinds of responsibilities, the man who did not know anything other than that, reached such a conclusion after trying his best to think about it.

More than anything, the eyes that stared straight at Ikki explained it.

Seeing those eyes.....Ikki smiled bitterly without thinking.

He noticed.

That's how it was, they were indeed father and son.  
—Because...

(My clumsiness in words were inherited from my father.)

In that case, his answer was obvious.

“It's fine. That kind of father is fine.”

Ikki looked back at Itsuki, and gave a big nod.

“Parent and child do not really need to be intimate.

There are fathers who force their sons to take the paths of their own ideals.

There are also sons who go against that and take the opposite path.

Opposing opinions. Two opposing sides. At the end of the parallel arguments, they will eventually hit each other.

—Isn't it a common story? Something like that.”

“.....”

Ikki said that everything that had happened was just at such a level.

What could the son saying those words be thinking about?

Itsuki.....closed his eyes for a moment...

“I see. This is certainly a quarrel between parent and child that can be seen anywhere.....Talking about cutting ties for such matters is indeed over-

exaggerating it.”

He sighed and said those words.

The corners of his mouth curved up slightly into a smile.

Just at that moment...

「The clean-up of the ring has been completed. The second match of the third round will begin in five minutes.」

The announcement informing about the start of the next match echoed.

Since it would start in five minutes, it was about time for him to go to the waiting room.

Hence, Ikki turned on his heels.

“Then, I’m going.”

“Ikki.”

Itsuki said from the back of Ikki.

Everything that happened until then.

Towards Ikki, who had treated everything that he had done to him, everything that should not be forgiven, as a quarrel between parent and child...

“You have become a big hearted person.”

He praised him frankly.

Hearing those words with his back facing him, Ikki...

“Hehe.”

Smiled embarrassingly, and walked out.

And on the way.....he finally understood why he could not come to hate Itsuki. He understood the reason.

「You can't do anything, so don't try.」

He probably felt that those words were not Itsuki's real feelings coming from his heart.

Because, wouldn't that be so?

(My name is, Ikki Kurogane.....!)

「Just one thing is fine. Become a person who shines brighter than anyone.」

He received the name with such a wish contained within from him—

(In that case, I will show you.)

He would show his father.

Carrying himself, repelling everything, shining brightly in the world he chose with his own will, with his own heart and body!

(Let's go. —Only three more to reach the top!)

## Part 6

「Ah, it's a relief that Contender Kaga is safe. I was wondering what's going to happen for a moment there.」

「It may look shocking, but it's only at the level of one internal organ being damaged, so it's not a big deal. Entering the capsule for an hour will completely heal it.」

「We can really feel the benefits of modern medical technology right now.」

「On top of that, the entire staff line-up this time is excellent. Especially Shinguuji-san's perfect emergency first-aid. As expected of the world's former number three.」

「You can say that only because of the cooperation between modern medical technology and excellent mage-knights, that we can organize the Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival.」

As the announcer Iida and Yaotome were giving their opinions about the earlier match, the buzzer

indicating the end of the break rang.

In accordance to that, Iida cleared his throat on the side and...

「Now then, since it's time, we will begin the second match of the third round battle!」

Announced towards the audience.

That information caused the venue to erupt in cheers.

That cheer was even louder than the first match.

That just showed how much attention the second match had garnered.

「Then, let's welcome the two Contenders for the second match who are entering the field!」

At the same time as those words were said, the night lights shone onto the stage, showing the figures of the Contenders.

「Appearing from the green gate, Akatsuki Academy first year! Contender Sara Bloodlily!

Even with just the power to manipulate the concept of colors, that colorfulness makes her the Kaleidoscope!

However, that is just a tip of her true strength!

She can replicate various kinds of weapons and troops. Above all, she is even able to replicate Blazers and their Noble Arts, the balance-breaking and versatile Noble Art Purple Caricature! That is her true strength!

Murata-pro had evaluated her to be on par with A-Rank, the so-called dark horse!

What kind of battle will she show us in the third round!？」

「Oya? Did Contender Bloodlily have a change of heart?」

Yaotome voiced out her doubt.

And Iida followed up.

「Speaking of which, she is wearing a different outfit from this morning. She is properly wearing clothes. It is a disappointing development for some of the audiences, but it's a great help for the TV station!」

「No, well, there's also that, but.....her expression is quite different.」



「Expression, is it?」

「Yes. Until now, whenever Contender Bloodlily stood on the ring, should I say that her attention was dispersed, or that there was no ambition.....she wasn't really focused, but.....I can feel a strong concentration and motivation from her now.」

As she mentioned it, the audience also felt the same.

Certainly, when Sara was facing off against her opponents up until the second round, her eyes were sleepy.

However, the current Sara was different.

Her eyes were as sharp as those of a predator targeting its prey, staring at the red gate.

「It's exactly as Yaotome-pro said, that's a good expression, Contender Bloodlily! It can be said that after unleashing her true power, there would be no need to act anymore! We are looking forward to her third round battle more and more! And! Now, the knight who will be her opponent in the third round will make his entrance!」

The announcer's voice caused the gazes of the audience to focus on the red gate.

Receiving the gazes from tens of thousands of spectators, the black-haired knight made his appearance.

「Born with the weakest magic power and the strongest sword technique, mowing down many strong opponents from the bottom, finally! This youth has appeared on the stage of the quarter finals for the country's best four! The anomalous F-Rank everyone knows! Hagun Academy first year! Contender Ikki Kurogane!」

「Kyaa! Kurogane-kun! Do your best!」

「Don't lose! Go at it with guts!」

Seeing the figure of Ikki, cheers of support came from the venue.

That were many times more of them compared to the second round.

「Whew! That's some impressive cheering! Thunderous applause came from the audience seats, welcoming Contender Kurogane!」

「Due to the location, there are many spectators from Osaka. The strength of Contender Ikki, who has won against the two powerhouses from Osaka, the former Seven Stars Sword King, Contender Yuudai Moroboshi and Contender Eye of Heaven, Byakuya Jougasaki, is recognized by them more than anyone else. Not to mention.....」

「Not to mention?」

「The unbalance from his gentle face and manly strength is well-received by the females. That's to say even I am a fan of his.....」

「I-I see! But please be impartial in your explanations?」

「I know that even if you don't tell me.」

Yaotome replied with a slight angry tone, then lifted her glasses, and commented after seeing the expression of Ikki who had just entered.

「But similar to Contender Bloodlily, Contender Ikki also seems to have had a change of heart.」

「Is that so?」

「Yes. Contender Ikki is someone who was branded

with F-Rank, a Contender with extremely low magic capacity. I believe that most of us know that his Noble Arts, Ittou Shura and Ittou Rasetsu, are limited to once a day usage due to his small amount of magic power. In other words, because he used Ittou Rasetsu in the battle against Eye of Heaven today, he does not have any trump cards left for this match. Regardless of being in such a disadvantageous situation, his expression is very relaxed. There's no trace of forcing himself or desperation.....As expected of the knight who has climbed up to this stage despite being F-Rank. His physical strength, and of course mental strength as well, are just at an abnormal level.」

Support from the audience. Praise from the announcers.

Ikki walked straight towards the ring while receiving them, and stood at the starting line.

Before his eyes was Sara, who had already finished her preparations, staring straight at him with an intense gaze.

Ikki struck up a conversation with Sara.

“Before I came here, I had a talk with my father.”

He wanted to inform her.

“It may be strange to say that we made up, but I believe that we have a better relationship than before.....It’s thanks to Sara-san. Thank you very much.”

In contrast with Ikki’s words of gratitude in a refreshing expression, Sara’s expression remained stiff.

“I have said it before. I don’t need your gratitude.....Rather than that, you must absolutely keep your promise.”

That’s right. Those words held no value to her.

What was important was to carry out the promise, just that.

Hence, Ikki deeply nodded and replied Sara’s words.

“Of course. I won’t do something like breaking my own promise.”

He could guarantee that. However—

“However.....Because of that, I can’t lose. I have made a promise to fight against Stella in the final

battle. Not to mention, this is a path I have decided to walk even if I have to beat my father down if he had interfered.”

He would not be half-hearted. That would not be allowed.

“That’s why I will win. I will defeat you and become the Seven Stars Sword King. That’s the perseverance of my willfulness!”

After that declaration, Ikki manifested his Device, *Intetsu*.

Then he pointed the tip of his katana, along with his sharp gaze, even sharper than his weapon, towards Sara.

Sara also returned an intense gaze not losing to his...

“.....I also have a promise. I decided selfishly, a selfish promise. But that.....the only thread of bond connecting me and my father.....I won’t back down.”

Manifesting her Device, *Brush of the Demiurge* and palette on her hands, she said.

“I will show you your defeat. Definitely—!”

“That’s good. Sara-san and me, whose promise.....soul is stronger? Let’s compete on that!”

Boiling with fighting spirit, the two of them waited for the signal to start.

The air between them carried a tense feeling as if it was going to burn their skins off.

As the tension was reaching critical point second by second...

「The two are ready at the starting line! Then without further ado, Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival third round second match begin!

Let’s GO AHEAD——!!!!」

The flame of battle was lit.

## Part 7

Let's GO AHEAD.

The first to move at the same time as the cue was given was Sara Bloodlily.

She was using a speed that even the speed-focused Ikki could not capture clearly to scoop up the paint on her palette.

And then...

“Color of Magic — Bright Yellow of Flash —”

She swung her arm and scattered the paint into the air.

In an instant, an explosion of light burst out from the scattered yellow paint.

It instantly encompassed everything in the dome, burning everyone's field of sight pure white.

“.....!”

「Kyaa!」



「Uwa, so bright!」

「The moment the match began, Contender Bloodlily's Color of Magic exploded! A strong flash that doesn't allow people to keep their eyes open has burst out! Just like a flash grenade! She just used a technique that will make the announcers cry!<sup>[9]</sup>」

The announcer covered his eyes as the flash that seemed to cause stinging pain burned his eyes.

On the other hand, Yaotome at the side had been expecting it.

The instant the flash exploded, she immediately changed to sunglasses to avoid the damage to the retinas.

However, their field of sight was only hindered for a few seconds. The color of the scene recovered soon after.

And Iida was...

「Aah, my eyesight has finally returned.....wooooah!?  
T-This is~~~~!」

At the same time as his eyesight returned, he was shocked by the scene he saw.

The audiences probably had the same reaction.

On the ring that finally regained its color, there were hundreds of skeleton soldiers holding assault rifles lined up in formation.

「This is the Necro Battalion of the Purple Caricature that appeared in the second round battle! Contender Bloodlily used it immediately in the third round!」

「It's a technique that has already been seen once before. It probably means that she doesn't have to be reserved anymore.」

“Hou? That's quite a haughty start for someone like her.”

Rinna, who was watching the battle from the audience seats, exclaimed emotionally at Sara's initiative filled with fighting spirit.

Because they were relatives, Rinna probably thought that it was rare for her to be so serious in a battle.

“That's unlike her personality or motivation, huh. Did

she have a quarrel with Worst One?”

“It seems that they have made a bet. If she wins this match, Ikki will become her model. If she loses, then she would not ask Ikki to be her model again, something like that.”

Stella conveyed what she had heard from Ikki, Rinna was dumbfounded for a moment, then giggled.

She had witnessed the scandal caused by Sara at the party.

That’s why she was able to comprehend the issue.

“I see. Well, it is unbearable for someone like her to keep bothering him.....However.”

Rinna took off her eye patch, narrowed her heterochromic eyes and smiled evilly.

“That condition might have been foolish. He lit the flame of motivation in an unmotivated person. Worst One has quite the skillful techniques, but it’s all martial arts. It’s all physical techniques. That power is just the extension of a single person. And then, how is he going to overcome the organizational power of modern weapons with only his own strength?”

Rinna's words had accurately captured the heart of the situation.

Bringing out an organization against a single person.  
Bringing out guns against sword.

Although it was just a simple concept, the disparity between the two was just that difficult to overcome.

Especially against Ikki, a knight who did not possess any area of effect attacks or long distance option, it was very effective.

The first move that Sara made had definitely pinpointed the weakness of the Blazer known as the Worst One.

(A good judgement. As expected, she has observed me quite well.)

A hundred muzzles pointed at him. Seeing that, Ikki on the ring smiled bitterly.

That Necro Battalion was once defeated in the second round.

By Sword Eater, Kuraudo Kurashiki's Ten'i Muhou.

And Ikki could use the exact same technique.

However.....it was only that. He could use the same technique, but he could not do the same thing.

The feat of diverting away the storm of lead from a hundred muzzles was due to Kuraudo's special physique.

Ikki could not do it.

(What I can do, and what I cannot do, huh. Sara has properly observed me.)

Ikki felt it deeply. However...

“However.....that's only if all of them hit!”

Ikki's lips curled slightly upwards.

The expression he showed was.....confidence.

And in the next instant, he took an action that shocked everyone in the venue.

「W-What! Contender Kurogane, instead of evading the hundred muzzles, he actually walked forward!？」

That's right. Not evading, not defending, he just

leisurely walked towards the muzzles of the skeleton formation.

Slowly, casually, he was relaxing his body as if he was taking a stroll.

Of course, the army of skeletons would not let such a foolish prey escape.

All of them in the formation pulled the trigger of their assault rifles together.

「Simultaneous fireeee——! The merciless gunshots have rushed towards the defenseless Contender Kuroganee!」

The surface of the ring was struck with a storm of lead.

The scrapped off stone blew white dust up.

The dust that raised up devoured Ikki's figure immediately.

「D-Don't tell me, it is decided so easily like that!？」

The anxiety of the announcer was probably shared by all the audiences.

However — they all knew immediately.

That worry was unnecessary!

「W-Whaaat!?!」

「Unbelievable!?!」

Voices of surprise came from the audience seats.

The announcer also witnessed it a moment later.

From within the raised white dust, showing up leisurely without a single injury, the figure of Ikki continuing his advance.

「They are not hitting!?! Despite being showered in that number of gunshots, Contender Kurogane did not lose a single drop of blood! W-What kind of magic is this!?!」

To the words of the announcer, Yaotome shook her head in denial.

「This is not magic.」

「Could it be, this is the Ten'i Muhou that we have seen from Contender Kurashiki in the second round!?!」

Yaotome denied that as well.

「No. That's also wrong. In the first place, Ten'i Muhou is an anti-personnel technique. It cannot divert that amount of gunshots. What Contender Kurashiki had done was relying on his superhuman reflexes, Marginal Counter, which he is blessed with from birth. It's a feat that nobody else can imitate.....Just now, what Contender Ikki has used is a completely different technique. It's not a technique that receives the gunshot and diverts it away, but not letting it hit in the first place. Does Iida-san remember the second match of second round in D-Block?」

「Of course! It's the match between Contender Momiji Asagi and Contender Shizuku Kurogane! Ah.」

Iida raised a voice as he noticed.

「It's Trackless Step!?!」

Yaotome nodded.

「Yes. He used normal steps and Trackless Step intermittently just now to disorientate his presence, making the skeletons' aim go haywire. If they target a spot that's different from where he is, of course they won't hit. Even if it is an assault rifle with a low bullet-concentration property, the bullet path will still slightly



stray.」

「T-That's how it was! As expected of the body technique of the God of War, Torajirou Nangou!」

「Well, that's obvious, but the most incredible thing is Contender Ikki's sense for body technique and being able to use the Trackless Step, which was originally used against a person, against an army. The only other knights who can use it like this are probably just God of War and Yaksha Princess.」

As Yaotome leaked a voice of admiration — a change occurred right after that.

「A-Aah! T-This is! Hearing the explanation just now, the formation of the Necro army has changed!」

Instead of focusing on one spot, the formation switched to firing horizontally together.

「This will make Contender Kurogane's disorientation meaningless!」

A desperate situation.

Before Iida could comment that, Yaotome muttered.

「It's a really foolish judgement.」

The reason for that mutter was understood in the next moment.

In accordance to the Necro Battalion switching from concentrated fire to horizontal fire, Ikki, who was mixing Trackless Step in a casual manner lowered his center of gravity deep down.

And then he leapt from the ground in that posture and dashed towards the formation with a soaring speed.

The skeletons faced against him with guns in a matter of course — but their previous judgement was already mistaken.

Ikki used Trackless Step because the density of bullets was beyond the limit of what his body could handle.

When they switched to a large area horizontal shooting attack, the most important factor, the density, thinned out!

(If it's this level of barrage, my Ten'i Muhou can also divert them away!)

There was no need to misguide them anymore!

「Uproar! Contender Kurogane! He broke through the

barrage and cut into the formation from the front!」

Ikki had rushed into the middle of the formation and swung his blade to mow down his sides, shredding the skeleton soldiers to countless pieces of paper.

The Necro Battalion shot back in response, but could not capture Ikki's quick movement at point blank distance.

That's obvious. Regardless of how strong the gun was, it was a point attack.

That advantage would not be useful if it was not used at a long distance.

Once the distance was shrunk, the sword would be stronger and faster!

「I-Incredible.....!」

The figure of Ikki cutting down the army of skeleton one after another.

With a single blade, not even using magic, that figure trampling down the modern weapons caused the audience to tremble.

「A person.....can actually do something like this

without using magic.....!」

「C-Cool.....」

And it was the same for the mage-knights, feeling touched by Ikki's sword handling.

The Chairman of the Organizing Committee, Thunder of Judgement, Yuuzou Kaieda, while watching the match, talked to Itsuki, who was sitting at the adjacent sofa.

“Goodness gracious, your son is really something. With just his body technique alone, he has reached up to this point, there probably aren't even five people in Japan at his level.”

“.....Because he's a guy that doesn't have anything else.”

The voice of Itsuki's reply did not contain any emotion as usual.

However, Kaieda also understood his position.

He was not expecting a reply in the first place.

He returned his gaze to the venue below soon after.

(But it's really impressive.....His movement is just like seeing The Last Samurai in his prime. And he is just a youth in the first year of reaching his adulthood<sup>[10]</sup>, how fearsome.)

And at the same time, he felt a bit of pity.

.....The 「F-Rank」 of Ikki meant he was 「out of evaluation」.

For example, if he had the power at the level of E-Rank, the Blazer would only get a bruise from receiving gunshots.

That was because the magic power would mobilize to project the flesh.

However.....F-Rank could not do that.

And half of Mage-Knights' jobs were close-combat types.

In other words, for an F-Rank to become a Mage-Knight was a very dangerous job.

Hence 「out of evaluation」.

It was the same for the Blazers that were obliged to

enroll into the mage-knight academies in countries that joined the League.

In other words, the 「F-Rank」 that was the international standard would not be treated as a Blazer in the first place.

It was just that.....weak. It was too fragile to survive in the world of mage-knights.

.....In a sense, Itsuki stubbornly opposing Ikki's path of knighthood was probably an obvious action for a father.

At the same time, he was also a supervisor troubling over the appearance of a reckless pursuer.

Despite being an F-Rank, he was a match against an A-Rank. That kind of a miracle was not something anyone could display.

Kaieda understood that.

Because he understood — he couldn't help but feel pity.

(If only he had the strength of an E-Rank, he could have chased after the summit more easily.)

And on the ring, Ikki had finally cut down the last member of the Necro Battalion.

「Contender Kurogane! He has annihilated the Necro Battalion without leaving a single one! S-Strong! Despite losing his trump card, Ittou Rasetsu, Contender Bloodlily's Purple Caricature could not do anything to him!」

Another One had overcome Sara's first move without a scratch.

Standing alone on the ring, anyone could cheer for his calm yet ferocious figure.

However—.....receiving those cheers, Ikki's expression was grim.

「Contender Bloodlily, how will she handle this monster —— eh, h-huh!?!」

The announcer noticed the reason soon after.

「What is this about!? Contender Bloodlily's figure disappeared from the ring!」

That's right. She disappeared.

The circular ring with a diameter of 100m.

Bloody Da Vinci, Sara Bloodlily was nowhere to be found!

The spectators were confused about that fact.

Did she escape? Out of the field? Then what about the counting, etc.

However.....

(No, she's here.)

Ikki noticed.

She would not escape.

That was without a doubt.....Sara's Color of Magic.

It was a magic to deceive the eyes of the surrounding people.

Able to cause people to see her like a stone on the roadside, stone gray.

(We were still able to see her at that time, but.....this time, I cannot see her at all.)



She probably used that much power in her technique.

It was difficult even for Ikki to capture her figure with his naked eyes. However...

(But if it's just at that degree, you won't escape from me.)

Even if he could no longer see her with his eyes, there was another method.

It was not complete stealth like Hunter.

At best, she could not be perceived by sight only.

In that case — he just needed to hear her.

The field was circular. From the bowl-shaped audience seats, the usual cheers roared.

The wave of that sound had a void.....a human-shaped void!

“Over thereee!!!!”

The time taken for the search was just a few splits of a second.

Ikki quickly switched from searching by sight to

searching by sound, locating Sara's figure, and cutting towards that direction.

The effect of stone gray would be lost once she was locked on.

Sara could not escape anymore. No—

“But it's fine.....I bought enough time to draw.”

—She did not need to escape anymore.

*\*Giiin!!!\**

And the blade of Ikki that swung down at the defenseless Sara was.....received and stopped by another blade.

A silhouette appeared between Ikki and Sara, and used the blade it held to protect her.

However, it only defended against the first strike.

Ikki did not think that he could defeat Sara with just one strike.

Since the battle in the second round, he had expected such development.

Sara was at a level that could use Purple Caricature to materialize the image of a Blazer.

However, he did not intend to retreat no matter who his opponent would be.

Attack with his all, overwhelming the other side. If one strike did not work, then he just had to add a second and third strike.

That determination was...

(.....Don't tell...me.....!?)

Blown away by the reality that had taken shape before his eyes.

What was reflected in Ikki's vision was — a pure white without a speck of impurity.

He could not have mistaken it for anyone else.

The image of a faintly glowing body like the sun at dawn, and a pair of pure white swords like a pair of wings was...

“Purple Caricature — Twin-Wings, Edelweiss.”

The world's strongest swordsman he had once crossed swords with in the past stood before him.

## Part 8

「『『———!!!!』』」

Twin-Wings, Edelweiss.

A woman whose name probably everyone knew, even if they were not knights.

Her appearance caused so much shock that everyone in the venue fell silent.

Amongst the heavy and tangible silence created by tens of thousands of people...

Fake Edelweiss leisurely raised her pair of wing-like swords horizontally, putting up a stance.

“A-ha-a—!?”

In that instant, Stella, who was watching over the match in the audience seats, hugged her body and squealed.

She felt it.

Just by getting into a battle mode, Twin-Wings

released a demonic sword pressure that made her very soul resisted looking directly at her.

(S-Scary.....!)

That sword pressure was not pointed at her.

What Stella felt was just the side effect.

Even so, her whole body trembled uncontrollably, cold sweat pouring out non-stop.

(Even though she's so far away, it feels like having a sword pointed at my throat! )

She could clearly feel the icy coldness of a blade.

It was that much of a dominating pressure.

Just from seeing her figure, she could tell the absolute difference in ability without even thinking!

(This is the world's strongest swordsman.....)

「W-What has happened! The world's most infamous criminal, standing on the highest summit of the swords' world, Twin-Wings, Edelweiss! Contender Sara Bloodlily, unbelievable, she has just materialized a super powerhouse!」

「I-I'm shocked.....she can even bring something like that out.....!」

「S-Serious-ly.....!」

「This is.....foul play.....!」

Stella was not the only one shaken by the materialization of the pure white swordsman on the ring.

The announcer, commentator, everyone in the audience seats, voices of shock trembled everywhere.

It couldn't be helped. The Edelweiss on the ring was a fake born from Sara's ability, but the majestic aura she carried was not any weaker than the real deal.

And that was painfully felt by Ikki, who had actually experienced it, more than anyone!

“~~~~~!!!!”

That's why Ikki escaped.

He retreated with everything he had, as far as possible.

He received her sword pressure from close range, causing his heart to be at the verge of bursting, even though he tried to suppress it.

—And then, more than the materialized image of Edelweiss, he was more wary of Sara's strength as an artist to be able to portray the existence of the world's strongest swordsman without a millimeter of an error.

“.....I had made a variety of assumptions. Even if Stella or older brother Ouma were to come out, I had resolved myself not to be surprised.....But.....to draw such a thing, how fearful.....! Bloody Da Vinci!”

“This is the only swordsman that you didn't win against. There is no reason not to draw her here.....I have spent almost all of my magic power to draw it, the strongest image amongst all the knights I have ever known, to defeat you without a room for doubt!”

Sara declared her victory in a tone mixed with her strong determination. And then — In that instant, the figure of Twin-Wings swinging down her blade appeared before Ikki's eyes without any sound.

“!!!!”



「Fas——」

A speed that even the broadcast could not follow.

The pure white blade was swung down with a speed similar to a white thunder.

Edelweiss's actions, from stepping in to attacking, all of it was soundless.

Her movements that were honed to the limit wasted no energy.

All of it was spent only on movement.

Due to that, the atmosphere would not vibrate at all, and sound would not be transmitted.

In addition, with an instant acceleration from 0 to 100%, such exchange between stillness and quickness made the swords of Twin-Wings difficult to be captured using sight.

A high speed and soundless slash that could not be detected by sight and hearing.

If he was a normal person, his life would have been ended without even noticing the slash.

The fake created from Sara's image also had such a trait.

However...

"Zuah!"

Ikki had already experienced that fact with his body.

Hence, he was able to defend against the white thunder-like first strike from the fake Edelweiss.

However, he did not have any room for relief after defending against it.

The instant Twin Wing's left wing was blocked by *Intetsu*, her right wing had already reached Ikki's nose tip!

"——Fuu!"

However, Ikki had already seen through the thrust from the right.

Although his cheek was grazed, he calmly tilted his head to evade.

He even swung his *Intetsu* and intercepted fake Edelweiss within his sword range.

In response, she also spread her two swords — and delivered her attack!

“UoOOOOaAAAAA——!!!!!!”

The sword flash of pure white and darkness intersected.

They collided, and sparks immediately scattered as the gales of steel clashed.

That’s right. Ikki clashed with her.

He had to rely on Ittou Shura in the past, but he could finally keep up with Twin-Wings’s swords!

—That was because of the performance of the fake was lower after all.

Wrong.

Ikki could tell as he clashed swords with her.

At least, fake Edelweiss could not be weaker than the time he fought against her at Akatsuki Academy in the past.

The clarity of her swords, power, presence, they were

all the same.

Even so, to be able to match up without Ittou Shura...

(That's just how much stronger I have become!)

He had obtained Edelweiss's sword technique from Blade Steal.

And the brain signals for battle that he switched in order to execute it.

He obtained a large amount of experience from that one fight.

Thanks to that, Ikki's basic battle strength had increased tremendously compared to that time.

Even without relying on Ittou Shura, he could already keep up with the battle in that territory!

(With this, I can at least endure through!)

"Haaa!!!!"

And finally, fake Edelweiss stepped back from the clash of swords with Ikki.

「UoOOOO! I-Incredible! Twin-Wings's swords, he has

pushed back the world's strongest swords!」

「GOOO! Another One!」

「Ikki-kuuun! Wiiiin it!」

Although Ikki did not respond to the cheers, he intended to do just that.

No matter how close that image was to the real deal, Ikki had to defeat her since he faced her on the ring.

In that case, it wouldn't begin if he kept running away.

Therefore, Ikki powerfully kicked off with his legs, and chased after the faltered fake Edelweiss. However...

(No, not good—!)

He should not have done that.

“——Gah!?!?”

The moment Ikki stepped in, his field of vision dyed red.

His whole body felt hot as if on fire, and large amount of fresh blood sprayed out.

Ikki Kurogane was cut.

And it was not a single stroke, but countless.

(This...is.....!)

「Contender Kurogane's body suddenly started to bleed as soon as he stepped forward! What exactly caused that!？」

「This is...a gap in air!」

「Yaotome-pro!？」

「I have heard about this before.....! Twin-Wings's slash is, in other words, the world's strongest slash. That speed, sharpness, everything is out of the norm! Due to that, the places her slash passed through will constantly leave a vacuum gap! Because of that sharpness, even the atmosphere cannot detect that it has been cut apart.....!」

The truth was just as Yaotome said.

The area that Ikki had rushed into after chasing the fake Edelweiss had vacuum slash scars from the crossing of swords before, like wind blades stalling in air.

It was exactly like Ayase Ayatsuji's Noble Art, Mark of the Wind.

Fake Edelweiss only had to swing her swords to create that phenomenon.

In other words, in the previous crossing of swords, fake Edelweiss was not pushed back by Ikki, she was retreating with such intention in mind.

And Ikki rushed into it.

Although Ikki felt something wrong right before it happened and stopped, it was not easy to come to a halt once he moved using Edelweiss's movements from Blade Steal.

He could not completely evade it, leaving countless slash wounds on his whole body.

However...

“~~~~~!!!!”

Be it the regret of his own shallow thinking for stepping in so easily, or fainting from the pain, Ikki knew that he didn't have room for such thoughts when fighting against the world's strongest

swordsman.

He abandoned all of his thoughts, and released all of his precious magic power he had recovered into his legs.

Just like how Stella and other normal knights did it, Ikki added strength to his feet by releasing magic power and kicked off, and escaped from fake Edelweiss's range with the highest speed he could achieve at that point of time.

That judgement was correct.

Not even a millisecond after, a flash of white silver ran past horizontally through the space where Ikki's head was positioned at.

Fake Edelweiss's dual swords scraped through the air with a speed that the eyes couldn't follow, leaving a trail of light.

If Ikki had delayed his judgement for even an instant longer, his head would probably be dancing in the air.

He truly escaped it by a hair's breadth.

However...



“Ha! Ha.....! Ah!”

The price was Ikki losing all his precious magic power.

Just stepping into her zone once took him everything he had.

And then, despite using it all up, it was a fact that he could not even land a single hit on her.

Because he had used everything he had, he was currently still hanging on to his life.

Due to those reasons, Ikki was convinced.

(She’s not inferior compared to the real deal in our previous battle.....it’s not just that!)

The fake Edelweiss before his eyes was much stronger than the one he had fought against before.

The Edelweiss back then was never serious until the last strike.

She was just fending off Ikki, and not seriously aiming for his life.

However, the woman before his eyes was different.

It was clear that the speed and sharpness was different, and more than anything, she was merciless.

She would even use techniques she had not used before to actively aim for victory!

“.....!?”

As Ikki took a certain distance away and thought about it, fake Edelweiss took a strange action.

She did not chase after Ikki, instead, she lightly turned the sword on her right hand and stabbed it into the ground.

*\*Katsun.\**

And right after that.

“Ah —— Gah!?”

20 meters away from fake Edelweiss, blood sprayed out from Ikki’s entire body again.

A pain as if his every part of his body was pierced by lightning at the same time.

It could’ve be some sort of magic attack.

That wasn't the case, though.

Ikki, who had received the attack, immediately remembered what it was.

(This...is...Dokuga-no-tachi.....!)

In the past, the real Edelweiss had shown him the same technique as Ikki's sixth secret sword.

Using the blade to transmit vibration into the opponent's body, causing a wave within his body to destroy it from the inside, a penetration technique using the sword.

Ikki's Dokuga-no-tachi transmitted the vibration by connecting with the opponent's Device.

However, just then, the fake Edelweiss used the ground of the ring as the medium, beating the vibration into Ikki's body from far away.

Then, she pursued the frightened Ikki to decide the outcome.

Crushing away the distance between the two with a flash-like speed, she swung down her twin swords with all of her strength.

“.....!”

Despite having spasms all over his body, Ikki reacted to it.

Holding *Intetsu* above his head horizontally, it defended against the falling pair of white lightning.

However — the strikes he desperately defended against did not contain even the strength used when stroking someone.

Seeing that the slashes from above would not hit, fake Edelweiss controlled the muscles of her body diligently as she swung down her swords, and all that energy — was transferred to her feet!

“Guh! Ha!”

As Ikki shifted his guard towards above, she kneed his defenseless body.

A step from the world’s strongest swordsman. The kick that gathered the intensity and all the energy, which had an impact that could pierce through the stomach, sank into Ikki’s solar plexus, sending his body flying backwards.

Ikki's body that was blown away as if he was hit by a large truck slid past the lawn outside the ring, crashing into the fence separating the audience seats and the ring. However, it didn't stop at there, the fence was bent from the root and launched towards the audience seats, crashing onto the steps in between the audience seats, climbing up with that intensity, eventually stopped at the top row.

「『『.....』』」

The impact from the scene that looked like a fatal traffic accident had just occurred caused the nearby audience to not even be able to raise a scream.

They were just staring blankly at the broken staircase, and the trail of blood looking like a red carpet, swallowing their breaths.

The fallen Worst One facing the night sky was.....lying immobile.

## Part 9

「I-I-Inteeeeeense——!!!!

A human body weighing around seventy kilo was blown away like a cannonball!!!

Contender Kurogane is out of field! Right now, the main referee has begun the count for out of field! Will he be able to return within 10 counts!? Nevermind that, is he still even alive!?

However, despite that, despite that.....! Too strong!!!!

Seven Stars Sword King! Eye of Heaven! Raikiri! The prided sword fight Contender Another One, Ikki Kurogane used to defeat famous braves one after another that continued to support his victory, at this distance, has been completely shut out! This power! There's no doubt about it!

Everyone in this place, including me, can understand it!

Before our eyes is the world's strongest swordsman!

It's Twin-Wings, Edelweiss herself!」

In that case — he could never win.

The knight at the level of competing over the summit of students would not even be her opponent.

That was.....the despair shared by all of the people in that venue.

That's right, even Stella, who had given all of her trust to Ikki.

As she watched Ikki getting beaten one-sidedly by Twin-Wings, then blown out of the field, she held her breath.

“Ikki.....!”

(Can't win.....!)

No matter how much she tried to imagine it, she could not see any vision of Ikki winning against that image.

Because she was powerful, she inevitably felt it.

Like a cat challenging a tiger.....such a stupidly large difference in battle strength.

However, the real horror was probably the drawing ability of Bloody Da Vinci, for being able to draw the tiger who saw that Ikki as a cat.

(Who could have thought that she has this kind of unreasonable power.....!)

「Five! Six! Seven!」

“~~~~~”

Stella bit her lip in frustration,

The count continued in the meantime.

The support for the fallen Ikki was.....none.

The spectators who had been cheering for Ikki just a moment ago were all silent with pained expressions.

Seeing the one-sided battle from a moment ago, even amateurs like them probably also felt it.



Worst One and Bloody Da Vinci.

The difference in power that existed between those two was blatant.

They noticed it. There was no meaning in continuing the battle anymore.

As an F-Rank, Ikki had fought well, but in the end, the world of mage-knights was determined by magic. Anyone would think that such an ending was inevitable.

And because of that—.....Not a single person had noticed.

The man that should be in the greatest despair was...

The man who had lost all of his strength and was facing the sky was...

Showing a confident smile from his mouth——

## Part 10

「Eigh——!？」

The main referee's voice clogged as he was about to count eight.

That was because, standing up with a voice as if he was just getting up from his bed, Ikki leapt out from the top row of audience seats, past the bent fence, then continued until the top of the ring and landed back on it.

「W-What! Contender Kurogane! He stands up on the eighth count as if nothing had happened, and just jumped back into the ring like that! And what a light movement! Even after taking on that kind of an attack, it's as if there was no damage!? How is this happening!？」

The announcer Iida could not believe it and was confused.

On the other hand, the commentator Yaotome had properly understood the situation.

「In fact, he is more or less not damaged.」

「Eh, even though the intensity of his flight dug a path in concrete!？」

Yaotome nodded.

「That's the reason why he's fine. A normal knight would've probably crashed into the audience seats with the fence and received fatal damage. However, Contender Ikki purposely rolled grandly like that, and dispersed the energy that normally should've destroyed his body into the ground.」

It was exactly as she explained.

All of the energy that had bent the fence and destroyed the staircase along the audience seats was originally something that would've affected Ikki's body.

However, Ikki cleverly shifted his body weight to escape to the off-side of that energy, making the surroundings shoulder the damage.

「Hence, the damage from the attack just now was lower than what it seemed.」

「That kind of thing, is it even possible.....!」

「In theory, it is closer to judo's receiving technique than sword technique. It is a basic body technique that non-Blazers also can use. Of course, it was a super difficult feat to avoid all of that damage. Only Contender Ikki, who is well-versed in martial arts in order to reach the extreme of his sword technique, has such innovation.」

And after completely escaping from that damage, Ikki fixed his breathing until the count of eight.

Hence, he was able to recover for a bit longer than if he had returned right after being blown away.

「I-Incredible.....!」

What flowed out from Iida's mouth was not the relay of broadcast anymore, it was a voice of admiration.

And that admiration was not towards Ikki's techniques.

It was towards his fighting spirit that did not wither a tiny bit despite being forced into such a situation.

「What a fighting spirit! When everyone believed that the match has been decided by the overwhelming strength of Purple Caricature, Contender Kurogane, who should be feeling the greatest despair himself, has not given up at all! Facing the world's number one sword technique, using up all of his abilities, he is somehow keeping up!」

Iida felt respect towards that youth who was at an age that could be his son.

However—

(But, that's all.)

Next to Iida, who was passionately praising Ikki, Yaotome analyzed the situation calmly.

Regardless of how well he could handle his body, how strong his heart was, what would it matter?

If he still had his trump card, Ittou Shura, it would be

another matter, but Ikki, who did not have it, and the world's strongest swordsman reproduced by Sara Bloodlily, the gap between the two of them would not be filled by just bringing out his guts or willpower. He would not get closer to victory.

In fact, Ikki had expended his precious magic power from just confronting his opponent once, and he was beaten back because of that.

On the other hand, Sara hadn't been hurt once since the start of the match.

No, rather than that, it was Ikki who failed to even deal any damage to the fake Edelweiss that Sara had created.

Speaking frankly, the difference was too great.

It could not even be called a fair game.

(I don't think there is any meaning in continuing this.)

And Yaotome was not the only one who thought so.

The main referee overseeing the match also thought

the same.

Therefore...

“Contender Kurogane.....Are you...continuing?”

Before announcing for the battle to resume after Ikki had returned from outside of the field, he asked.

Would he continue, or would he not.

Ikki laughed bitterly at those words.

He noticed how much they had worried about him because of those words.

The hidden meaning in the referee’s words was as such.

Forfeiting against such an out of norm opponent would not damage his reputation.

Nobody would criticize him.

Retreating was also a form of courage.

However, even though he felt that, Ikki answered.

“Yeah, of course I will continue.”

He did not back down. As such.

Was it his obstinacy?

—No.

In fact, Ikki had no reason to retreat.

As for why—

“I have seen through the limit of that fake.”



## Part 11

「C-Contender Kurogane! With a very strong tone, he has shown his intention to continue!

Although the main referee looks troubled, he has allowed it! The match resumes!

Contender Kurogane, despite saying that he has ‘seen through the limit’, will we really be able to see him overturn this hopeless situation!?’

「He’s probably putting up a front, after all?’

「T-That’s the case, isn’t it? He was being done in one-sidedly just now.’

「B-But, I don’t feel that Ikki-kun is putting up a front like that.....’

The venue became rowdy from Ikki’s declaration after he had returned to the field.

However, most of them weren’t even trying to half-believe him.

Well, it wasn't unreasonable.

Ikki had not been able to do anything against fake Edelweiss after facing her all that time.

And the person who did not believe in Ikki's words the most was his opponent Sara.

"Purple Caricature is indeed not the real thing. But it is able to reproduce the exact same potential as the real thing. Stop with the useless bluffing."

She knew the performance of her Purple Caricature.

Therefore, she could assert that there was no opening for Ikki to take advantage of.

The reason was that the sword technique Ikki was using had been stolen from Edelweiss.

That would never win against her Purple Caricature which had equivalent performance as the original.

There was a relationship of absolute superiority-inferiority between them.

That's why Sara had drawn Edelweiss.

She should not lose. Sara had absolute confidence in it.

However...

".....Sure, at first, I was surprised by the strength of this fake, which can even be said to be stronger than the time I fought with the real Twin-Wings. But I can peel off that kind of facade made only for show after crossing swords several times. No matter how fresh an apple is drawn, it doesn't contain a single drop of juice. No matter how beautiful the blooming flowers are drawn, they don't have any fragrance. Your image is.....just that kind of thing."

Ikki did not cower, and declared in a strong tone while he lifted the tip of *Intetsu* up.

"Come at me.....With me at my weakest, I will defeat that fake of yours."

## Part 12

“.....!?”

Ikki's abnormal confidence confused Sara.

However, no matter how much she thought about it, she could only see him as putting up a front.

Although he had been keeping up for a while earlier, in the end he was still overwhelmed by Sara's image.

Ikki did not fare well at all and it ended with him being kicked out of the field.

(There's not a single fragment of doubt that my image will win!)

As if responding to her heart's voice, the fake Edelweiss kicked off the ground.

And as expected, she reached Ikki without a single sound and launched consecutive strikes with her twin swords.

“Haaa!”

Ikki retaliated.

Black steel dealt with the falling white flash.

However, there was a difference of one sword and two swords. And more than anything, there was a difference between their fundamental specs.

As the number of rounds they crossed swords increased, Ikki was being constantly pushed back.

And finally, with a high pitch of metal clashing, *Intetsu*, along with Ikki’s right hand, were repelled back in a big arc.

Ikki was defenseless before fake Edelweiss.

Despite being an image, such a fatal opening would not escape Edelweiss!

The right sword was about to split Ikki from his head to his bottom.

(It’s settled—)

Sara was sure of her victory, but—

Ikki lightly swayed sideways and evaded that strike which would've split him into two.

With tranquility, without any signs of panic.

And with his deflected right hand, he slashed back horizontally with a great momentum, forcing Edelweiss, who guarded against it, out of the sword range with his strength.

(Eh.....)

Sara was dumbfounded at the unnatural ease with which he had dodged the decisive strike.

「Oi, just now.....」

「He overcame it? Really?」

「It's probably on purpose like before, to make him chase after her?」

The audience probably did not believe that Ikki had

overcome Edelweiss either.

Their reaction was completely skeptical.

It couldn't be helped. He couldn't fight back at all until a while ago.

However, that was only until the first retaliation.

Fake Edelweiss released a light speed thrust between Ikki's brows as she closed in again.

In response to that, Ikki leaned back as he lightly dodged it, and in that posture, he returned the same strong slash in retaliation, forcing Edelweiss back again.

「[[[~~~~~!!!!]]」

Anyone would have noticed up to that point.

The one who was superior in the match currently.

The confused chattering received confirmation one after another.....and changed into a storm of cheers!

「S-Surpassed! We thought that the fake Edelweiss retreated on purpose at first, but there's no mistake on the second time! There's no doubt that, currently, Contender Kurogane has pushed back against fake Edelweiss at close range!」

「Incredibleeee! That was not even a millimeter away from his nose tip just now!?!」

「He really saw through it.....! He wasn't putting up a front!」

The unexpected attacks from Ikki had caused the slightly chilling atmosphere in the venue to rapidly rise in temperature.

However, those cheers could not be heard by Sara's ears.

Because the confusion in her head had already caused her to be unable to recognize them.

(Why, all of a sudden.....!)

Until a while ago, her image's speed and sharpness had suppressed him. Why!?



Thinking about that, Sara had suddenly reached a conclusion.

She had heard about it.

Ikki Kurogane was able to read his opponent's thinking pattern to a scarily accurate degree.

“Don't tell me, this is Perfect Vision.....!?”

“There's no need to use that.”

The person who denied Sara's thoughts was.....Ikki himself.

That's right, in fact, he did not need to reach such a deep level of thinking at the moment.

Rather than that.....there was no need to think at all.

“Even if I don't think that deeply about it, I will realize after thinking about it a little. Blazer's ability is unique for each individual. That's absolute. No matter how versatile the power seems to be, Sara-san's power is only the ability to 'materialize your own image' if you

trace it back to its origin.”

Color of Magic was a Noble Art that materialized the image Sara connected the color to.

Purple Caricature was a Noble Art that directly materialized the image she drew as it was.

In other words, her ability was not the power to create a fake exactly like the original.

It was only the power that materialized the imagination sketched out from her image.

“But how accurate can your image be? The outer appearance is the same. That’s probably not a problem. Physical ability as well, from Sara-san, the world’s number one artist’s observant eyes, you can draw it out without any error. However.....after that?”

Be it Ikki’s sword or Edelweiss’s sword, one strike after another, they were swinging their swords at a super high speed that normal humans could not even recognize with their sights.

In addition to that, the instant their swords met in

attack and defense, there were feints with their gazes and presence. They were vying for control with their presences.

As they executed their strikes, there was a process of exchanging a battle of wits back and forth, that had been repeated many times.

That way of thinking, the sequence of thinking — could Sara's image achieve all that?

“There's no way you can do it.”

Ikki declared.

It was not a territory that a person, who had never held a sword before, could imagine.

It was a world of instinct reserved only for those who actually shed blood and tread along the line between life and death.

In other words, that fake Edelweiss did not have it in her body.

Only her specs were reproduced

Since she couldn't imagine the inner contents, they couldn't have been reproduced.

“However, there is a question in that case. There is no content inside, then why is she moving? Why is she fighting? I have one hypothesis regarding that. And then I have confirmed my hypothesis in the midst of fighting. When I received the attack from above, I purposely left my body's guard open.”

“Purposely.....?”

“That's right. And then.....thanks to that, I have confirmed it.”

In response to Ikki's action, fake Edelweiss chose to kick him out of the field.

Dealing damage to the opponent, and expecting a countdown for out of field, it was a pretty good move.

—However, in the case when used against an opponent at Ikki's level of body techniques, it was hard to say if it was really a move with certainty.

Even though he would be blown out of field, he would not continue to take hits, rather, there was the risk of him taking the chance to adjust his breathing due to the interruption for out of field countdown. In fact, Ikki had done just that.

Based on the result, the loss from that confrontation was on fake Edelweiss's side.

If she was the real deal, she would not have made such a naive mistake.

Instead of the victory before her eyes, she would've probably prioritized defeating her opponent with certainty.

However, the fake made her move. She prioritized the possible victory from out of field countdown that she saw before her eyes.

—From that behavior, Ikki confirmed that his hypothesis was correct.

“What you have projected is ‘Edelweiss who will win against Ikki Kurogane’. That's why she seeks victory recklessly. She will bite onto the slimmest opening she

sees.”

“.....!”

“And then.....it’s been easy once I understood that. I just have to purposefully create the shortest route towards victory. I just have to purposefully attack and create an opening to show her a glimpse of victory.”

If he did that, she would stupidly rush in straightforwardly just like then.

Time and time again.

She wasn’t a living creature that could think in the first place. She was just an image seeking victory.

She couldn’t even learn from experience, and couldn’t stop herself once she saw a glimpse of victory.

“Such an easy and naive attack, no matter how fast, how sharp, or how many times she performs it, it doesn’t matter. —It’s not scary anymore.”

“Kuh!”

At Ikki's confident smile, Sara could not hide her overflowing agitation.

The reason was obviously because Ikki's deduction was right on the mark, seeing through the true colors of fake Edelweiss made from Purple Caricature.

Like he said, Sara did not have the ability to draw the detailed offense, defense and thinking pattern.

What she could draw was the information of the model she had observed, and the concept of 'victory'.

Hence, when the opponent took on defense which was further from victory, the image of Blazers she had created from Purple Caricature would break through that defense for 'victory', taking tactical actions in accordance to the fake's specs, it was still considered as passive. If the other side showed a glimpse of 'victory' defenselessly like what Ikki had done.....she would advance straight towards it. She wouldn't be able to not advance.

Because fake Edelweiss was not a living person, just an image for the sake of winning against him.

However—

“So what.....”

Sara glared at Ikki with a strong gaze and responded.

“Even if you understand it, you cannot win against this image! The sword techniques you are using are just an imitation of hers.....! Another One and Twin-Wings have a relationship of absolute superiority-inferiority! Then it doesn’t matter whether there is inner content or not. Reproducing the specs is more than enough to win.....!”

As if she said it to convince herself, Sara spoke with a loud voice unbefitting her.

At the same time, fake Edelweiss moved.

She flew straight towards Ikki.

She planned to materialize the victory in the next round. Her strengthened steps were just like a reflection of Sara’s spirit.

A pure white killing intent closed in soundlessly



In response to that, Ikki...

“.....I see, that’s reasonable.”

Did not show any intention of running away, and just intercepted the closing in fake Edelweiss straight on.

It was a stance to settle it in a frontal confrontation.

That could be described as a reckless action.

The reason was because, just like what he had said, Sara’s words were reasonable.

Despite not having the inner content, the specs itself were undoubtedly the world’s strongest.

Facing such high specs in a straightforward manner itself was very dangerous.

In addition to that, the sword techniques Ikki was currently using were an imitation of hers.

The difference of proficiency in the technique and magic power between the two were evident.

Just seeing through the flaw of Purple Caricature would not shake the superior-inferior relationship.

Those were facts. Sara did not say anything wrong.

That's right. She did not make any mistakes.

—Just that...

“But Sara-san. You have made a serious misunderstanding.”

She had made a fundamentally fatal misunderstanding.

Ikki had noticed.

Sara was mistaken about ‘the knowledge about battle itself’.

She considered that the outcome of a battle depended on who was stronger.

However, that was a big misunderstanding.

A battle was not simply something that the one with greater power would win.

It was not a competition between numbers.

An instant, a round, just seizing the chance of victory in that moment was what a battle meant, seizing that moment was what a victory meant.

(Then.....there's no need to win in everything.)

One hit was fine.

Just once, it would fine to win in one round.

In that case, it would be a different story.

No matter how big the difference between them was...

Even if the gap between them was so ridiculously huge...

(If it's just neutralizing the first strike, when I know where it will be coming from, then it's not impossible!)

“———!”

It was the instant fake Edelweiss swung down on the crown of Ikki's head in order to seal the victory.

Ikki moved all of his muscles at the same time using the technique stolen from Blade Steal.

Using the highest instant speed, the fastest strike Raikou from the secret swords he possessed, he swung horizontally at the pure white killing intent, aiming to cut her into two.

—With both his hands.

That's right, that was Ikki's chance of victory.

Certainly, like what Sara had said, they had a superior-inferior relationship in their sword techniques. The difference in perfection between the two was unshakable.

However.....it was wrong to say that they were both using the exact same sword techniques.

That's obvious. Edelweiss's Device was two swords. Ikki's was a single sword. In the first place, their battle

styles were different.

And then if their styles were different, then of course there was a difference in ease of use.

Edelweiss's twin sword style was a super attack type sword technique that shut out her opponent with an overwhelming number of strikes.

Once the opponent was captured by that circle of storm, it would be uncontrollable, but as she could only swing her swords with a single arm, each strike's power and speed would be lesser.

On the other hand, Ikki used single sword style.

He fell short in number of strikes, but each strike's power and speed would be above hers.

In other words, before Edelweiss's consecutive strikes started, if he had just limited it to the first strike...

(I have the upper hand——!)

“HAaAAaAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!!!!”

And then, both sides swung their magic swords at a speed that was impossible for eyes to follow and cut through the night, crossing in a brief instant.

The pure white blade split Ikki's scalp, and the moment it was about to cut through his skull...

The pure black blade split a horizontal line across the body of the fake of the world's strongest knight, reducing that image into paper scraps.

「C-C-Cut apaaaaaart!!!! Contender Kurogane! Although it's a fake, he has cut that Twin-Wings, Edelweiss into two! He has retaliated against that hopeless difference in battle power with one strikeeee!!!!」

「O-Oi oi, seriously!」

「He really won.....!」

「His opponent is already defenseless! Finish it in one go like that!」

“No...way.....”

In the midst of the echoing cheers from the excited audiences after seeing a reversal, Sara leaked out words of astonishment.

To an amateur of sword techniques, she could not understand why fake Edelweiss had just lost.

Hence she could not comprehend the situation, only felt confused.

However, that result was obvious to Ikki.

“Even if she’s the world’s strongest, she was imagined by an artist who had never held a sword before after all. But my *Intetsu* is different. This is my soul. The moment I decided to advance on the path of knighthood, my life shares its fate with this sword instead of my heart. This sword holds my everything.”

His sword might not be comparable to the world’s strongest Twin-Wings.

However, despite so, that sword was the real thing filled with the inner content.

His dream of wanting to be a man like Ryoma

Kurogane someday.

Not yielding the path he was advancing, and drawing a line against his father who obstructed him.

The responsibility towards the dreams of knights that reached up to the current place.

—And then, the inviolable promise with his important girl.

They were all within it.

Therefore, he could not lose.

“Heart, technique, body, these are the important things that cannot exist without the others, yet that fake was missing two of them.....how could I have lost against that!”

Saying so, Ikki lowered his stance...

“This match, is my win.....!”

And dashed towards Sara who had lost her strongest trump card.



In order to reach a conclusion of that showdown.

「Contender Kurugane has rushed iiiin! S-So fast!」

“~~~~~!”

On the other hand, against the incoming Ikki's attack, Sara could only panic after losing her strongest hand that was the fake Edelweiss made with most of her magic power.

However, that probably couldn't be helped.

The paint that was her magic power used to draw Purple Caricature only had bits remaining.

Although she still had some of her magic power left, Sara did not have a model that could win against an opponent who could defeat Twin-Wings, even if she was a fake.

She could not think of anyone that could fight against Ikki's assault.

(There's nothing.....! I can't come up with

anything, anything.....!)

She would lose at that rate.

However, if she lost there—

「In the upcoming third round, if Sara-san wins, I will be your model like you said. But if you lose instead, please give up on making me your model completely.」

—She would not be able to make Ikki her model again.

If he couldn't become her model, it was the same as saying that she would not be able to complete her father's relic forever.

After wandering around the whole world, Ikki was the one she had finally found.

She could not easily change her mind and find another model.

Sara clearly understood that Ikki would never fade away from her mind.

If that was the case.....she would probably never be able to draw on that painting forever.

It was a premonition of an absolute defeat.

Sara felt a chill that froze the blood circulating throughout her whole body as she imagined such a future.

(That kind of thing.....d-don't want it.)

The promise to complete that painting was the only bond between her father and her.

She didn't want to lose it.

.....At first, she definitely felt like that.

However, as Sara learned about painting, she came to know about the joy of drawing, her emotion expanded.

That was — jealousy.

Sara had spent half of her life working hard in order to fill the blank space in the painting left by her father.

Along the way, she had obviously tried to draw on it many times.

However, each time — she lost to it.

Originally, the painting of the Messiah burning away the devils spreading around was drawn with amateurish skill, a drawing style that seemed to be more or less self-taught, and a usage of color that made one doubt his sense.....from the not successful painting of a man who ended as a nameless artist, she could feel his burning passion even after his death.

Sara was already a world-recognized artist.

Her fame of course, as well as her skill, sense, everything was above her father.

Even so, she could not win.

She was frustrated. And at the same time, she admired him.

Someday, someday.....she wanted to draw a painting that would not look inferior when put in the center of that painting.

She wanted to become an artist that could draw it.

She came to think like that.

Hence, it was not just a condolence to complete the painting left behind by her father.

Sara Bloodlily's — an artist's pride was on the line for that challenge.

To let go of such an opportunity.....she could not accept it.

There's no way she could accept it.

Like Ikki betting his life on the path of knighthood, Sara also betted her life on the path of an artist.

(Cannot lose.....I am also.....!)

—In that case...

“Purple Caricature, Another One!!!!”

With a drawing speed that could be even faster than

Ikki or Edelweiss's swords, she created a fake Ikki.

What's more — four of them.

Ikki opened his eyes wide in surprise.

After defeating her strongest hand, he stepped in because Sara had no more means of opposing.

Such a counterattack was completely out of his expectation.

However, he wavered only for an instant.

“Seiyaa!!!!”

Ikki immediately recollected his confused mind from seeing the fakes, and decapitated one of the four fakes that challenged him with Ittou Shura, rendering it to paper scraps.

On his second breath, he easily cut down another one.

However, that's also obvious. Since his opponents were none other than Ikki himself.

What he was good at. What he was poor at. What would be coming from that posture.

His advantages and disadvantages. His habits and tendencies — he knew them all better than anyone.

Those half-heartedly made fakes would not be a match even if there were four of them at the same time, no matter how close to perfection they were.

However — Sara already acknowledged such that.

The man that her strongest model, Twin-Wings, could not win against, would not be suppressed by that level.

She could never win with such an empty image.

However, just one thing.

There was just one thing that she believed that she would not lose against Ikki.

That was, the passion towards the painting, towards the path she had decided to advance.

(Just that, I definitely won't lose to you.....!)

Then — she could draw it.

Nothing anyone else, she would materialize her own soul.

She would inject her own passion and soul into the canvas.

There's no way it wouldn't come out. —In the first place, painting, creation, was just that kind of thing!

“——.....”

At the same time Ikki had slain the third one, Sara took a deep breath, then infused the last of her magic power into the *Brush of the Demiurge*.

Then she began to imagine.

The passion within herself. An incarnation of it.

(—First, the gender should be male.)

A feminine man would not do.



Even if it was to beat the opponent before her, her own wish should be prioritized.

If she wanted to sketch out that kind of wild passion, a man big like a rock would be good.

Arms like logs that could sweep away all obstacles.

Legs like huge pillars that could trample over all reason.

And then, a huge diamond sword that would cut apart all those that stood against her will.

The flesh would be as hard as welded steel, the blood flowing through the whole body would be as hot as magma, the bravery from the blood-soaked outfit would be like of the gladiators of ancient—

.....Like flowing water, Sara was creating the incarnation of her passion on the empty canvas.

Even though she wasn't really thinking, the image overflowed without stopping.

Sara infused those overflowing inspirations and passions in a trance.

And after sketching out most of the image, when she was about to image the color of that incarnation in the end.....

That, happened.

“Eh.....”

She was so shocked that she lost her voice.

Before she was even thinking, her brush was already dancing on the canvas.

And she drew it.

A painting that was the incarnation of Sara’s passion.  
That man’s face.

Sara gazed at the face of the incarnation she unconsciously drew — and smiled bitterly.

“.....What. I properly remembered it.....”

She was convinced.

That's how it was.....there was no other appearance better than that to illustrate her passion.

She could say that she was certain right then and there.

That was, that was exactly — the shape of her soul!

“Purple Caricature — Mario Rosso.....!”

Magic power passed through the painting that was drawn on the empty canvas, materializing it.

Appearing on the ring was a bloody gladiator in his prime with a height of three meter.

At the side of the image she drew after wringing the last of her magic power, Sara shouted.

“Ikki.....it's showdown.....!”

The voice she raised did not contain an ounce of anxiety.

That voice caused Ikki's lips to curve upwards after he slaughtered the last fake.

He understood from a single glance.

The fakes before were incomparable to it, which contained a heat seemingly to sting his skin—

That image was.....the real thing.

Similar to his *Intetsu*, a materialization of her soul.

That was exactly—

“Just what I have hoped for.....!”

Ikki took an assault stance by sinking his center of gravity down.

However, even faster than Ikki could inject power into his legs to kick off, with a speed that was not any worse than fake Edelweiss, Mario Rosso closed in and swung the huge sword in its hand at Ikki's head.

The slash produced from that overwhelming arm strength contained power that could split the ring in

two with only a single strike.

However, it could not reach Ikki.

In response to the incoming powerful strike, Ikki kicked off the ring with all his strength and leapt.

Then he used his extraordinary eyesight to evade with a hair's breadth...

“Saigeki——ii!!!!”

A secret sword that concentrated all his momentum onto a single point, Ikki stabbed towards the center between the bloody gladiator's eyebrows.

A clean hit with no room for complaint.

Even so...

“——!?”

The rock-like body of Mario Rosso did not budge even the slightest.

On the contrary, Ikki's sword could not even pierce

into a single layer of its skin.

Mario Rosso twisted its head to shake off *Intetsu*, then mow down its huge sword towards the airborne Ikki.

Even Ikki could not mobilize his body in mid air, he hurriedly used *Intetsu* as a shield. However—

“Gah!?!?”

The instant its diamond huge sword came into contact with *Intetsu*, Ikki’s whole body was trampled by an unprecedented impact, blowing him away like a ball hit by toss batting<sup>[11]</sup>.

He slid over the ring for tens of meters, then rolled until the edge of the ring.

Ikki had mitigated some degree of damage like the time he was thrown out of field, and stood up immediately, but...

“Guh.....!”

—Just receiving one strike had crushed both of his arms.

The bones from the tips of his hands to his shoulders were completely shattered.

It had that much of an impact. Of course, he could not hold *Intetsu* anymore, it spun in the air above the ring after his hands let go and fell down.

And before it fell onto the ground — Mario Rosso chased after Ikki to deliver the finishing strike.

Its huge body dashed forward with an unbelievable speed while its powerful strike was swung down onto the ring.

It was swung with all its strength, cutting apart anything that stood in its way.

Against that, Ikki already lost his weapon and even his arms...

“I win——!”

In the next instant after Sara believed so, fresh red blood spilled onto the ring.

The blood was.....boiling like magma.

“!?”

Sara opened her eyes wide in shock.

The body that was cut apart was not of Ikki, but her passion.

However, how was it done?

Even though Ikki did not have a weapon anymore.

Thinking until that far, Sara noticed.

Ikki's movement while he was rolling, the positions the two of them were standing were—

(Oh...no.....!)

Over there was the vacuum distortion that, though a fake, the world's strongest swordsman had carved with her slashes.

That's right. After knowing that his own slash could not pass through, Ikki had intentionally lured Mario



Rosso towards that location.

And at the same time the magma-like blood of Mario Rosso spilled out, Ikki moved.

That was the moment to decide the outcome.

He maintained his low posture, dived below the vacuum distortion like the time when he rolled pass there, and passed under the side of Mario Rosso. He dashed like an arrow on the ring just like that, and bit the handle of *Intetsu* that was falling down with his teeth to stop its fall.

And then..

He stabbed *Intetsu* into the abdomen of Sara, who was still in shock, with his body as if colliding into her.

## Part 13

“Ka...fu.....”

Blood flowed out from Sara’s mouth as her body was stabbed, and she fell onto her knees.

At the same time, the incarnation of her passion was also blown away by the wind after becoming paper scraps.

The outcome between the two was decided at that moment.

“It’s my win.”

“.....Un.”

Sara stayed silent for a while after Ikki’s words, then acknowledged the reality in a quiet voice.

She had already exhausted all of her techniques and willpower.

Even so.....the reality was that she did not win.

And then, because he accepted it—

“But.....I can’t keep that promise.”

She spoke those selfish words.

Ikki’s eyes turned round in surprise.



However, Sara did not care.

It was fine even if she was ridiculed as a coward. It was fine even if she was reproached as a liar. It didn't matter even if she was treated as a bitch.

Because...

"I am the daughter of a bastard that died falling on his canvas. This passion.....I won't give it up."

Ikki was surprised at Sara's selfish declaration, but he sighed as he gave up.....and smiled.

"What a hopeless person you are."

He felt troubled. However, he somehow felt glad as well.

She saw Ikki's smiling face as he accepted her selfishness when she was losing her consciousness.....  
For the first time, Sara felt jealous of Stella.

And she thought.

Someday.....if she were to fall in love.....she wanted to love someone like that.

## Part 14

Bloody Da Vinci collapsed onto the ring like a puppet with its strings cut.

At the same time, the main referee announced the end of the match.

He informed everyone that Ikki was the victor.

「We have reached the conclusion—! Another One vs Bloody Da Vinci! A fierce fight with quite a few reversals! Contender Bloodlily has shown her will at the last moment in the end, but the last one standing on the ring is Contender Kuroganeeee!」

「H-He won, he won it!」

「He really won against an opponent with that kind of cheat ability!?!」

「Kya! Ikki-kun is the best!!」

Applauses showered onto the winner of that fierce fight without any reserve.

Amongst the applauses, Akatsuki Academy's Rinna Kazamatsuri sighed in disappointment.

"Hmpf. To think that even Sara lost. Even my demon eye could not have foreseen this result.....With this, I can't keep my head up in front of Tsukikage oji-sama."

"Please don't feel down, my lady. There are still Ouma-sama and Amane-sama left."

"Well, that's true.....But I don't understand. Even though there's the weakness of only being able to take action according to its 「drawn concept」, Sara's Purple Caricature should have undoubtedly reproduced the power of White Summit<sup>[12]</sup>. As Sara was there during the 「Baltic Crisis」 by White Summit in Middle East, she definitely witnessed it directly.....Even so, why did she lose in the fight? It's not like Another One is in the same league as White Summit."

"It might be true in regards to their total specs, but if he knew where his opponent's first strike would come from, it's not impossible for him to win the fight. Kurogane-sama has an advantage in terms of the



difference in their battle style.”

“Difference in battle style?”

“Yes. The sword technique that fake Edelweiss and Kurogane-sama used was to bring out the highest speed and greatest power in an instant, which was its main concept, by moving all the related muscles at the same time. However, the main concept may be the same, their Devices are different. Compared to fake Edelweiss’s twin sword style, Kurogane-sama is one sword style. In that case—”

“Ah! Another One holding the sword with both his hands will have an advantage in a single hit!”

“Exactly. The total amount of muscles mobilized in that instant is double through a simple calculation. The kinetic energy generated by utilizing all that will make several times the difference. By breaking through with that advantage and the weakness of Purple Caricature only being able to take action according to its 「drawn concept」, Kurogane-sama seized the victory in that moment.”

“I see.....there’s such a principle behind it.”

“However, this principle is possible obviously because of Kurogane-sama’s high level of sword technique. Normal people probably won’t be able to reach Sara-sama’s Purple Caricature even if they knew the principle.....As expected of the knight called Another One despite being F-Rank, he lives up to that nickname.”

Originally, those two were not from the side that should be happy about Ikki’s victory, but they honestly felt admiration towards Ikki’s strength for defeating Bloody Da Vinci without his trump card Ittou Shura.

However, besides the two of them, Stella, who should have been the most happy for Ikki’s victory was...

Trembling.

Was it due to Ikki’s victory?

No.

She was.....able to comprehend it because she had that level of power.

The real reason for the victory of that battle.

Certainly, it was a fact that Ikki used the advantage of one sword style.

However — the reason of his victory was not that. It was also not the difference in battle style.

As for the reason why.....aiming at the weakness of Purple Caricature, even after using the advantage between their battle style — in the instant they crossed each other, the side that touched the opponent first with the blade was none other than fake Edelweiss.

That's right. Heart, technique, body, despite missing two out of the three, the world's strongest sword still did not allow the young samurai to take initiative.

Stella definitely witnessed that instant.

Hence, she resolved herself for Ikki's loss.

However.....the result was as it was shown.

Ikki's blade severed his opponent's life first.

Why exactly was that the case?

Stella was confused, and after that.....shivered.

She noticed.

At the instant of that contact, Ikki took a devil-like tactic.

(Ikki has probably realized it too.....)

It would be impossible for Ikki Kurogane to misjudge the difference in strength between him and his opponent. He knew it.

Even if it was a fake without inner contents, even if he used the advantage of the first strike, his opponent's slash would reach him first.

That's why he covered up for that delay.....by using the characteristic of Purple Caricature.

He lured the slash towards his head, taking it with his skull, which was the hardest bone in the human body!

Of course, no matter how hard it was in terms of human bone, Edelweiss's sword could easily split it in half.

However, its speed would drop regardless compared to cutting flesh.

That was probably a fraction of instant not even reaching 0.1 second, but—

Both of them had a slashing speed that normal people couldn't even see.

Just filling up that.....the outcome was reversed.

And he grasped it.

From the opponent even Stella could not see any hope of winning, he won in just one round.

(.....Geez, what a guy.....)

Against the white blade, the world's number one slash, the idea to use his own head as a shield.....was not normal.

The moment he thought of it already meant that he was abnormal.

To actually carry it out, he was already at the level of being doubted about his sanity.

However — being able to do that was exactly the knight that was Ikki Kurogane.

A failure with F-Rank that could not even be treated as a Blazer by the country.

His opponents were always above him.

He had fought his way through with only those kinds of battles.

He was constantly giving his all and putting his life on the line.

He would pour in every effort he could think of and moved in to fight..... and continued to obtain victories.

—And from there, he had cultivated his extraordinary

strength.

That was already beyond the range that Stella and the others could imagine.

And with such dimensionally different tactics and tenacity, in the face of a difference in battle power that did not contain a fragment of a chance of victory through others' eyes, a disadvantage without a chance of reversal — he completely overturned it.

That was the real horror of Worst One, Ikki Kurogane, who had refined himself through countless disadvantageous battles.

Stella shivered at the horror of that Ikki...

(Seriously, only against you alone, I don't feel that it would be easy to win.....Ikki!)

She trembled from the joy that overwhelmed her fear.

No matter how overwhelming the difference between their power was, she would not be at an advantage.

To the strong ones, there was no opponent more

troublesome than him.

Because Ikki was like that, she couldn't stop herself from loving him.

If it was him, he could probably take her on at her full strength.

Power, technique, heart.....he could probably take on everything she had and stop it.

(After that.....just one more thing!)

The moment of bliss with her most beloved rival.

The time she dreamt of had already come so close to the point where she felt like her hand could almost reach out to it.



**Intermission - Bloody End**

# 破軍学園壁新聞

キャラクターピックアップ

文責・日下部加々美

SARA BLOOD-LILY

## サラ・ブラッドリリー

### ■PROFILE

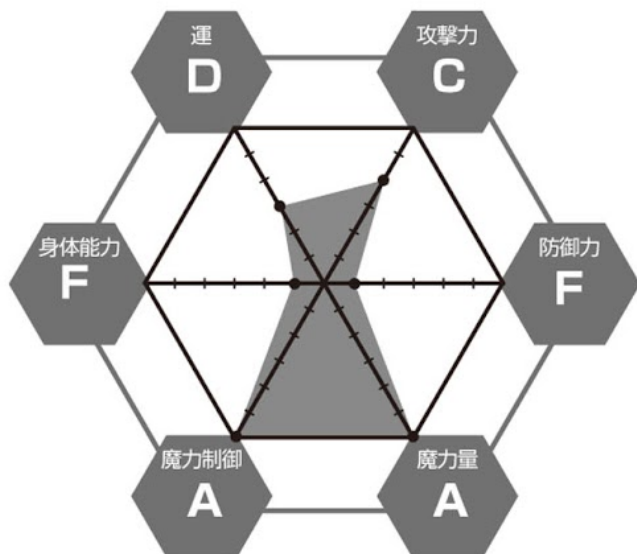
所属：暁学園一年

伐刀者ランク：C→A

伐刀絶技：バブル・カリカチュア 幻想戯画

二つ名：血塗れのダ・ヴィンチ

人物概要：某有名画家との噂……？



### かがみんチェック！



七星剣武祭二回戦で真の力を見せてきた暁学園の一員。自分のイメージを具現化するっていうとんでもない汎用性を持つ伐倒絶技で、《ノウブルアーツ 剣士殺し》と《ソードイーター 無冠の剣王》を苦しめた難敵だね。

ただこの伐倒絶技も万能というわけではなく、あくまでも彼女のイメージでしかないから、その範疇を超えるものは描けないみたい。

その弱点を絵に『構図』を持たせるという形でカバーしていたみたいだけど、今回先輩はその『構図』の欠陥について勝利したわけだね。

先輩さすがです！

## HAGUN ACADEMY WALL NEWSPAPER

Character Topics \_\_\_\_ Writer • Kagami Kusakabe

### Sara Bloodlily

#### ■ PROFILE

Affiliation: Akatsuki Academy, Year One

Blazer Rank: C → A

Noble Art: Purple Caricature

Nickname: Bloody Da Vinci

Personal Summary: Rumored to be a certain famous painter...?

Attribute chart (starting at far left, going clockwise)

Physical Ability: F

Luck: D

Offensive Power: C

Defensive Power: F

Magic Capacity: A

Magic Control: A

### Kagamin Check!

*A member of Akatsuki Academy, who revealed her true power in the second round of the Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival. Using an outrageously all-purpose Noble Art that manifests one's mental*

*images, she's a difficult opponent that tormented Sword Eater and the Crownless Sword King, right?*

*It's just that even this Noble Art isn't totally all-purpose; since it only creates what she imagines, it can't draw things that go beyond her imagination. She tried to cover that weakness in her painted composition, but Senpai noticed the defect in that composition and ended up taking the win. That's Senpai for you!*

After leaving the ring, Ikki went towards the Medical Room to receive first aid before walking towards the audience seats reserved for participants.

He was going to meet up with Stella there.

By the time Ikki returned, Rinna, who was watching the match together with Stella, had already left first to visit Sara, leaving Stella alone.

She congratulated her lover who returned after his narrow victory.

“Congratulations for advancing to the semi-finals. You must be grateful to your parents for giving you that stone head of yours.”

“Haha.....As expected, you were observing me very well.”

“You have returned pretty fast, but is it fine not to go into a capsule? Those arms and your skull as well.”

“I have received the first-aid treatment by the staff in the Medical Room using healing technique, so it’s fine for the time being. The arms are hurt pretty bad, but my skull just got a slight crack.”

The reason why there weren't any additional cracks was because of the sharpness of Edelweiss's sword which utilized all the energy without waste.

Well, if the slash didn't contain a sharpness that would not cause additional cracks, he wouldn't have lost in speed in the first place, so it was weird to say that it was the silver lining in the cloud.

"More importantly, it's Shizuku's most important moment now. I can't be sleeping as a big brother. It won't be too late to go into capsule after this."

"Shizuku, I wonder if she can win."

".....I don't know. Since I don't know her opponent's true strength."

It would soon be the start of the third match in the third round.

The opponent Shizuku would fight against was that Amane Shinomiya.

A Blazer that used Nameless Glory, an ominous Noble Arts that belonged to the causal interference system, which simply granted his wishes.

In the first round, using its power, Amane had forced one of the powerhouses, White-Robed Knight, Kiriko, to forfeit the match without even fighting. The second round was also won by default like that. His opponent got food poisoning and forfeited, such was the story, but since he had such an ability, it would be hard to think of it as a coincidence.

And currently, it would be the third round, but—

“She had said that there was some sort of secret plan, but can you think of any?”

“No, I have thought about it, but honestly speaking, I have no idea.”

In any case, he couldn't imagine what kind of battle style she would take.

Just that.....there was no doubt that Shizuku was also a powerhouse that it would not be strange for her to become the Seven Stars Sword King.

It would probably be rude to worry too much.

She was also a knight.

Believing in her victory, cheering for her with his

friends was the most—

Ikki noticed as he thought up to that point.

“.....Speaking of which, where’s Alice?”

In response, Stella shook her head.

“The thing is, I haven’t been able to find him all this time.”

Stella thought that he would be staying next to Shizuku for as long as possible at first, but it was already right before the match.

He should be returning by that time, but—

“Could he be lost?”

“I believe that it doesn’t apply to Alice alone.....”

Should he let Stella make a call since he couldn’t use his arms?

And, as he was thinking of that...

「Dear guests. As we don’t have much time, let’s begin the third match of the third round!」



The announcer informed everyone of the program.

—Well, since it's Alice, he would definitely be cheering for Shizuku.

Even if he was not here, he should be cheering for her properly.

As Ikki thought so, he abandoned the idea of having Stella make a call, and turned his gaze to the ring.

「Third match, competing for the top of D-Block are Hagun Academy first year, Contender Shizuku Kurogane, and Akatsuki Academy first year, Contender Amane Shinomiya! Now, let's welcome the two Contenders as they enter!」

Spotlights moved to light up the gates on the two sides.

「However, seeing this third round again, every match has the family name 「Kurogane」 entered. As expected of the bloodline of the Great Hero.」

「That's true. If Contender Shizuku wins this match, the semi-final would be like an internal family battle, that would be interesting on its own, is what I think. Anyway, since Contender Amane had won by default

in the first and second round, we have no data on what he is like.」

「The first round was because of a medical emergency, and the second round was food poisoning. He is quite a lucky boy, but what exactly will he show us in this fight? I am looking forward to it.」

Listening to the banter of the announcer and commentator, Ikki was certain.

The Organizing Committee did not know about Amane's ability.

If they knew that Amane had been winning by default since the mock battle of Kyomon Academy, they would not be saying those lines.

Well, the representatives were chosen based on the standards of each academy.

The Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival Organizing Committee's job was just organizing the Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival in the end.

They probably wouldn't obtain the data for the mock battles within academies.

It would be meaningless even if he exposed it.

Because he could not provide any evidence that Amane had affected that astronomical chance of coincidence.

—In the end, how would Shizuku fight against such an incomprehensible opponent?

Ikki focused.....and then, he felt something wrong.

It was the same for everyone in the venue.

As for the reason—

「.....What happened? Both Contenders are not entering.」

That's right. Even though they were invited to enter, Shizuku and Amane did not appear.

To that fact...

“Ah——”

*\*DOKUN\**

Severely...

*\*DOKUN\**

An Ominous Premonition.

「The announcement is already made, right?」

「That should be the case, but.....let's display the waiting room for now.」

And...

「.....Eh?」

Ikki's premonition was — right on mark.

「FUFU.....AHAHA.....」

The big monitor in the venue displayed a blood stained waiting room—

Then.....a scoffing Amene with blood dripping from all over his body and...

Pinned to the wall by countless swords, with arms stretched out like the crucified Christ.....was the figure of Shizuku Kurogane.

「AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA——!!!!」

“Sh-Shizuku!!!!”



An ending with the screen colored in blood.

That showed the end of one battle, and the start of another.

That's right.

Most likely.....it would become the greatest trial for the Worst One, Ikki Kurogane—

The nightmare semi-final, the beginning of that—

# Afterword

Thank you very much for buying and reading the seventh volume of Rakudai Kishi no Eiyuutan.

I am Riku Misora, suffering from hay fever. ( It's currently March.)

The eyes and nose are not really affected, but, anyway, my skin really itches.

This is a really tedious season for a person having Japanese cedar pollen allergy.

And I finally got a cat.

So cute! But it really avoids me! (Bitter laugh)

Well, it's already six years old, a fine adult. It can't be helped.

I hope that it will purr in a cute \*gorogoro\* voice one day.

Now then, leaving aside how the author is doing recently, let's get to the main topic.



This seventh volume, which is about the Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival, is finally reaching its climax.

The stage of the eighth volume next will be the Seven Stars Sword-Art Festival's semi-finals.

It will be one of the climaxes in the national arc.....that's the plan.

The author will also raise his spirit and work hard to write out the passion of those people.

Please look forward to it (the hurdle raising style).

Now then, for the last part...

The editor-san in charge for always putting in effort to raise the quality of the manuscript.

Won-san for the cute illustrations of the heroines in their kimonos (Stella's and Shizuku's kimono appearance is shown earlier in manga). (TL note: the manga showed Stella's kimono figure before the content of vol 7 of the Light Novel.)

The staff making the anime while the original work is still in progress.

And then, the readers supporting this work.

Thank you all very much.

Let's meet again in the eighth volume.

# Notes

**1** TPO - Time, Place, Occasion.

**2** 不〇子 - Fujiko Mine from Lupin III

**3** Geta - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geta\\_\(footwear\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geta_(footwear))

**4** NG - No go/good.

**5** Ninna nanna ninna oh - An Italian lullaby.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wd5sO3gRGeo>.

<http://www.mamalisa.com/?t=es&p=2168> for lyric and meaning.

**6** Mawashi - The loincloth sumo wrestlers wear.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mawashi>

**7** Shiko - An exercise sumo wrestlers use.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8iPX7GQZjQM>

**8** Dosukoi - A sumo exclamation used to tell the opponent to come, also can be used as provocation.

**9** If the announcer cannot see the situation, then the announcer will not be able to report the battle, that is interfering with the announcer's job.

**10** 元服して一年 - It's a Japanese coming-of-age ceremony, signifying that the child has attained adulthood by wearing the Genpuku.

**11** Toss batting - A batting technique for softball.

**12** White Summit - 《白き頂》 Another nickname for Edelweiss.

# Credits

Author: Riku Misora

Illustrator: Won

Translator: Sora

Editors: Abedeus, KLSymph, Kidstandout